VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2012

FOUR DOLLARS

New Game in Town • Creating Fish Habitat • Virginia's Jim Clay

SEPTEMBER/O

CTOBER 2012 CONTENTS

5 NUCS: A New Game in Town
by Clarke C. Jones
Two new events in the dog trials circuit are designed for you to hone skills while having fun.

10 Reaching Out to American Heroes
by Ben Swenson
Hampton Roads kayak fishermen make a splash with far-reaching ripples through this tournament.

14 Saltwater Fly Fishing Beckons
by Beth Hester
Looking for a way to expand your fishing range and repertoire? Try this!

18 Virginia's Watery Wonderlands
by Glenda C. Booth
Why should we care about protecting wetlands? They are biological supermarkets.

22 A Quest For Snakeheads
by King Montgomery
The waters of the Potomac watershed are teeming with these toothy invaders. Catch one for dinner.

25 Habitat, Where the Fish Are At!
by John Copeland
Fisheries biologists work statewide to improve lake habitat for fish… and, of course, you.

28 Virginia's Own: Jim Clay
by Bruce Ingram
A seasoned turkey hunter and box call maker shares a bit of home-grown advice.

31 2012–2013 Hunt Guide
Field biologists share their insights about the coming hunting seasons.

43 AFIELD AND AFLOAT
45 Off the Leash • 46 Photo Tips • 47 Dining In

About the cover: Gobbler hunting. Story on page 28. ©Tommy Kirkland

©Ralph Hensley

BOB DUNCAN
Executive Director

Recently I was saddened to learn of the passing of longtime outdoors columnist Bill Anderson from Birchleaf, Virginia. Bill's column was one of the longest-running outdoors columns in the state, and he will be sorely missed by sportsmen and women in his beloved Southwest. I enjoyed Bill's writings and the occasional telephone chat with him. One of the last conversations we had concerned our Department's intent to re-introduce elk to Virginia. Bill was pro elk and he fully supported the plan to restore them. In recalling his work, I am made mindful of the fraternity of outdoor writers that I have been privileged to know and in no small way benefit from. Growing up in the New River Valley, I was a faithful reader of Bill Cochran's column; I still enjoy teasing Bill about the fact I grew up reading his work! In my home town of Radford, the first outdoor writer I read was a contributor to the newspaper for which I was a carrier, or paperboy—as I think we were referred to back then. Jim Rutherford was his name, and I recall he wrote a lot about boating and Claytor Lake.

Later in my career, I was introduced to other Virginia outdoor writers, including the late Bob Gooch, the late Max Ailor, the late Garvey Winegar, and Bob Hutchinson and Wallace Coffey. All of these individuals, whom I consider "old school," were revered by their readers. They were great storytellers and educators. They entertained with their individual styles and yet they informed folks about issues and impacts. They supported our Department every chance they could, but they also took us to task when we fell short, and rightfully so. We are a better wildlife agency because of it.

I think it is fair to say that the newspaper business has changed dramatically, and along with it, the outdoor writing game has changed to include many more activities: "extreme this" and "extreme that," along with mountain biking, cross-country skiing, hiking, kayaking, and more. A fresh generation of writers plies their craft in the new world of social media and in ways never before imagined. I am told it is progress, but I must confess I miss the larger-than-life writers (in some cases, characters) who had the look and feel for figures like Robert Ruark and Ernest Hemingway and Jack O'Connor and Fred Bear. Here's thanking those gifted writers for all they have meant to Virginia's wildlife!

Perhaps I am old school, too, because I still believe in the power of print. Sally Mills and staff have done it again with a great line-up of articles in this September-October issue. My spirits soar when the fall comes, and reading about field trials and the hunting guide in this issue will whet your appetite for going afield. Jim Clay is one of the most gifted educators and turkey hunters I know. Heed his advice on the "how-to" for turkeys. Snakehead fish fascinate me; the article on where and how to locate them is a must for snakehead anglers. Improving lake habitat, a fishing tournament for wounded warriors, and a review of saltwater fly-fishing tackle and methods help round out this hefty issue.

Arrival of the fall season also serves as a fresh reminder of the honorable mission undertaken by Hunters for the Hungry. Please note the artwork featured on page 31, which benefits that fine organization (more information available on page 44).

We look forward to seeing you out there somewhere!

MISSION STATEMENT

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Bob McDonnell, Governor

HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEES
Subsidized this publication

SECRETARY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Douglas W. Domenech

DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND INLAND FISHERIES
Bob Duncan
Executive Director

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD
Lisa Caruso, Church Road
J. Brent Clarke, III, Great Falls
Curtis D. Colgate, Virginia Beach
Ben Davenport, Chatham
Garry L. Gray, Bowling Green
James W. Hazel, Oakton
Randy J. Kozuch, Alexandria
Hugh Palmer, Highland Springs
F. Scott Reed, Jr., Manakin-Sabot
Leon O. Turner, Fincastle
Charles S. Yates, Cleveland

MAGAZINE STAFF
Sally Mills, Editor
Lee Walker, Ron Messina, Contributing Editors
Emily Pels, Art Director
Carol Kushlak, Production Manager
John Copeland, Mike Fies, Matt Knox, Ben Lewis, Gary Norman, Marc Puckett, Jaime Sajecki, Staff Contributors

Printing by Progress Printing Plus, Lynchburg, VA.

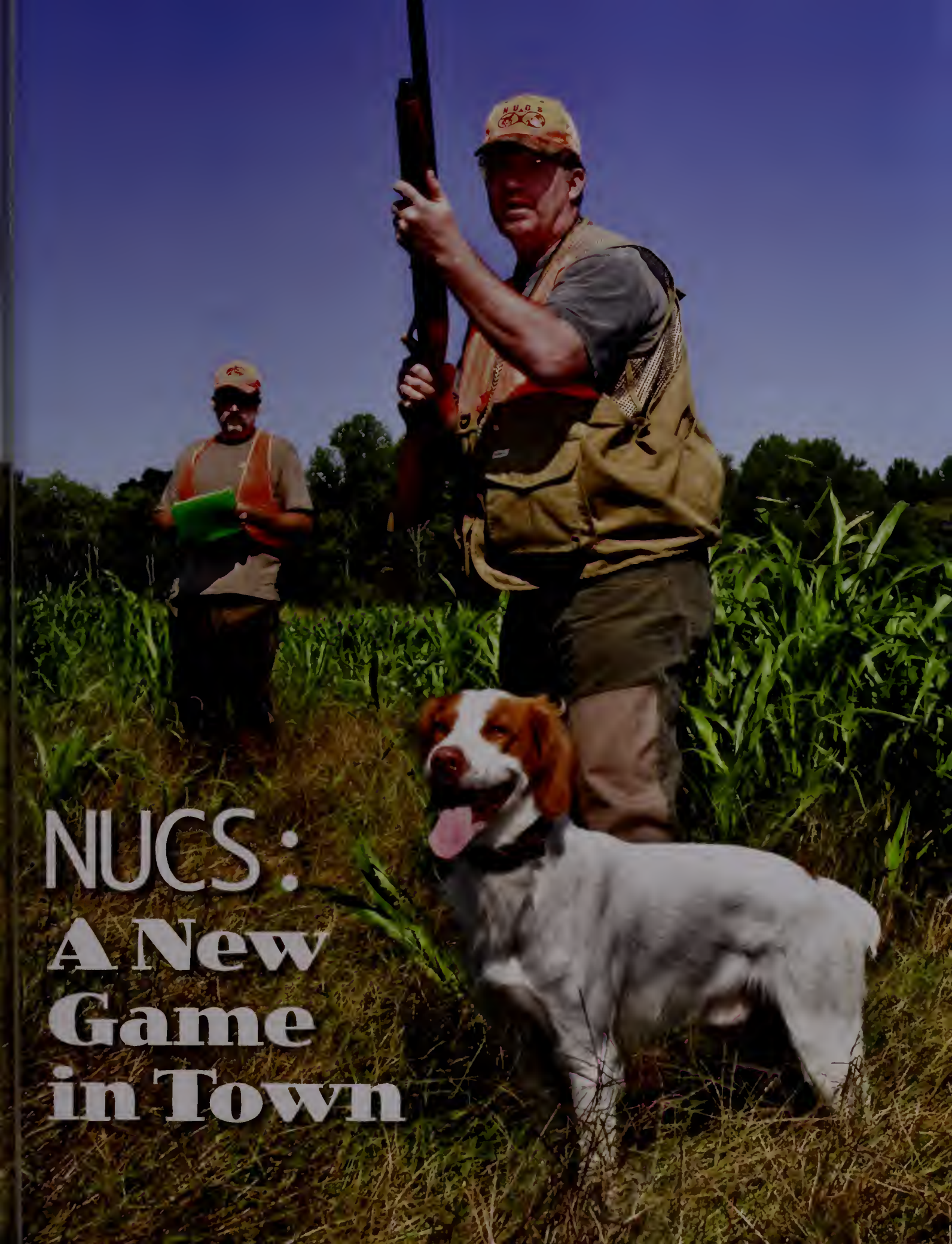
Virginia Wildlife (ISSN 0042 6792) is puhlished monthly by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Send all subscription orders and address changes to Virginia Wildlife, P. O. Box 830, Boone, Iowa 50036. Address all other communications concerning this publication to Virginia Wildlife, P. O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. Subscription rates are $12.95 for one year, $23.95 for two years; $4.00 per each back issue, subject to availahility. Out-of-country rate is $24.95 for one year and must he paid in U.S. funds. No refunds for amounts less than $5.00. To subscrihe, call toll-free (800) 710-9369. POSTMASTER: Please send all address changes to Virginia Wildlife, P.O. Box 830, Boone, Iowa 50036. Postage for periodicals paid at Richmond, Virginia and additional entry offices.

Copyright 2012 by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. All rights reserved.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries shall afford to all persons an equal access to Department programs and facilities without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, disahility, sex, or age. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please write to: Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, ATTN: Compliance Officer, (4010 West Broad Street.) P. O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104.

This publication is intended for general informational purposes only and every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy. The information contained herein does not serve as a legal representation of fish and wildlife laws or regulations. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries does not assume responsihility for any change in dates, regulations, or information that may occur after publication.

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C005991


NUCS:
A New
Game
in Town

Working as a team, Marlene Sipes directs one of her Labs to another part of the field. Dwight Dyke

by Clarke C. Jones

Luke and I are sitting obediently behind one of those large, round hay bales as the bird boy puts out three pheasants. I am not allowed to see where the birds are being placed in this 10-acre field, but I'm hoping Luke will take a peek and give me a heads up. Unfortunately (for me), a couple of cute little female Nova Scotia duck tolling retrievers saunter by and he is thoroughly distracted. The scorekeeper motions us forward, hands me six 12-gauge shells, and asks, "Are you ready?" I glance at Luke—who is always ready—and then nod in the affirmative.

Luke is at heel when we arrive at the gatepost, which is our starting point. I command him to "Hunt 'em up!" and the scorekeeper starts his stopwatch. Luke takes off like a shot. My job is to keep up with him as he sniffs the air and ground to track down the first of the three pheasants hiding somewhere in the grasses.

Hunting with your dog is fun but hunting with a group of about 100 people watching you is a little uncomfortable. Luke could care less. He is in his element and doing what he loves to do. I am not worried about how he will perform in this new type of field trial (at least, new to me), but I do know that if I shoot at a pheasant and don't kill it cleanly, it may sail for quite a distance. Luke, accustomed to my spotty shooting, is used to chasing pheasants a couple of hundred yards and then tracking them down to retrieve to me. In fact, he can get darn smug about it when he brings them back and often rolls his eyes as if to say, "Boy—what would you do without me!"

Chasing and retrieving a pheasant into the next county might be impressive on a hunt, but there is a stopwatch clicking off time and a bird that a dog has to find. If we take too long, we lose. Suddenly, Luke is getting birdy! My hands are getting sweaty. His tail is rotating faster than a swizzle stick at a bar on Saturday night. He punches his way through the tall grass. I rush in, trying to stay close. Luke dives into a thick bunch of cover and up roars a cock pheasant, cackling his displeasure. I bring the gun up and fire.

◆ ◆ ◆

Dogs participating in one form of competition or another most assuredly began before the inception of the National Field Trial

Dwight Dyke

Scorekeeper Bill Crowley prepares to add points for the shot by Richard Sipes and retrieve by his Lab, Uno.

Association Championships in 1896, by those who loved bird hunting dogs and felt it necessary to try to formalize a way to measure a national champion bird dog. Setting a national standard for excellence would, it was thought, improve the breeding of bird dogs. And while it may have proven to some which was the best pointer or setter for a particular year, it was open only to pointers and setters and to those few gentlemen who had the means to either train bird dogs or hire someone who could. Field trials for retrievers came along much later—in 1936—per the American Kennel Club. According to the American Kennel Club's website, the first National Amateur Championship Stake for retrievers was held in 1957.

As in many sports, the growth of a competition fuels the intensity of winning and the value of possessing a champion canine increases. More effort is required to meet the growing competition, and that usually requires more resources of both time and money. It became increasingly difficult for a non-professional to compete in retriever field trials, and the tests for a retriever to become the National Field Trial Champion seemed less and less like normal hunting situations. Retriever owners seeking to test their dogs in ways they felt were more realistic hunting situations started new clubs and organizations such as NAHRA, which held its first trial just outside of Richmond nearly 30 years ago. Out of these organizations, tests for retrievers developed into hunt tests because they simulate what a dog may be required to do in an actual hunting situation. In a similar way, bird dog owners have formed various tests for

Dwight Dyke

Ladies like Donna Cartner from Statesville, NC, with English setter Jody participate frequently in NUCS trials.

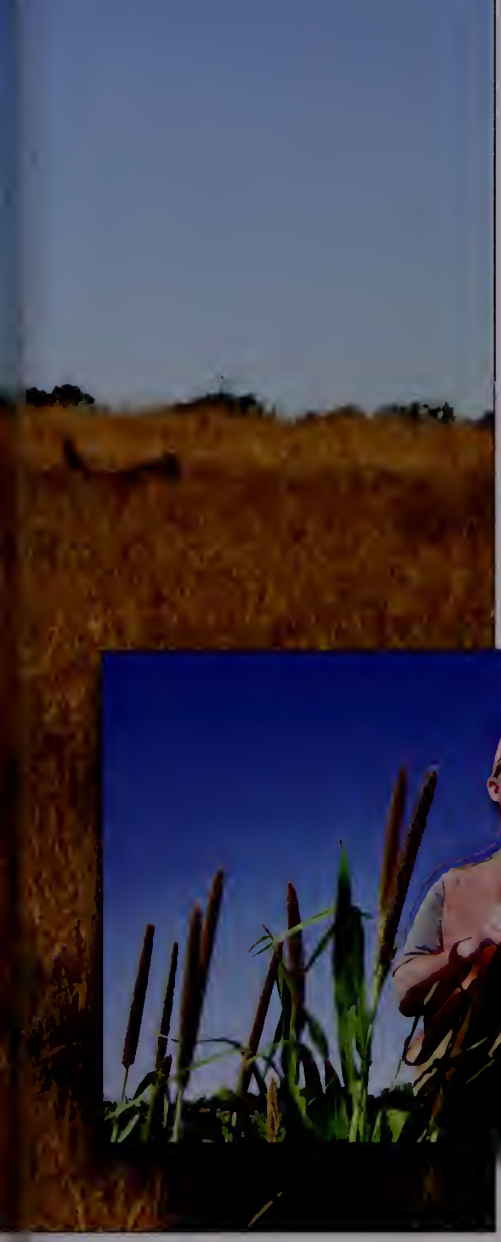
A scorekeeper records the shot by Marlene Sipes along with her dog's retrieve.

their dogs, which attempt to measure both the pointing and flushing breeds' excellence in the field.

Hunt tests and field trials are a means to keep your hunting dog sharp and ready for the next season, after the current hunting season closes. In areas of the country where both habitat and quail are still available, that may hold true. However, the combination of limited wild quail, somewhat difficult access to waterfowl, and the continual decline of the birds' natural habitats means hunting dogs may be doing more trialing and less hunting all year 'round. Running your dog in hunt tests or field trials is certainly a worthwhile and healthy activity, but it is the dog's skill and intelligence that is measured. The disadvantage is that human participation can be relegated to more of a trainer/handler position and less of a bonded hunting partner with one's dog. As a result, other forms of hunt tests or field trials have evolved, which attempt to re-establish the human and dog hunting partnership that began eons ago, developing into trials for non-hunting dogs as well.

In the late 1970s an organization called the National Shoot to Retrieve Association was formed to allow pointer and setter owners to compete against each other in a simulated hunting situation, where a dog and his owner/handler would hunt placed birds in a prescribed area. The hunter/dog teams that are the most productive within a set time frame win the competition. These events have become more and more popular over the years and the competitions are set up all across the United States, culminating in a national championship.

Two events, the National Upland Classic Series (NUCS) and the National Bird Dog Circuit—open to both pointing dogs and flushing dogs, have emerged as the latest hunting trials where you and your dog can participate as a team. There are individual fields or trial areas set up of anywhere from 7 to 12 acres. Flushing dogs work in one field and pointing dogs work in a different field. In each field has been placed three pheasants or other game birds. The hunter is given six shells. When the hunter and his dog enter the field, they are followed by a scorekeeper who starts a stopwatch. The hunter/dog team has a specified time limit in the field. The hunter who shoots the birds and then has his or her dog retrieve the birds in the shortest amount of time, with the least amount of shots fired, wins the trial. There is no judging of performance of



Dwight Dyke

the Open Class is for dogs over 3 years. There is also a doubles teams category, where father/son, husband/wife, or you and a friend who may not have a dog but loves to hunt can participate.

Richard and Marlene Sipes recently hosted the NUCS and Circuit events at Liberty Corners Farm in Esmont. Dog owners lacking a place to hunt their dogs are drawn to these events, and because these trials are open to any hunting breed, you will see a larger variety of hunting dogs than at other trials. Ed Callendar, from Woodbridge, brought his two good-looking Nova Scotia duck tolling retrievers (first noticed by Luke) to participate in their first trial, and Jason Pittman from girlfriends are coming to the tournaments to participate or watch—the ladies are enjoying the camaraderie and support enthusiastically the women competing in the sport."

Both the National Upland Classic and the National Bird Dog Circuit offer a fun, relatively inexpensive way to hunt with your dog. For the bird hunter, these trials offer a brief tune-up for their hunting companion. For those who have always wanted to give bird hunting a try or just see what their hunting dog might do if given the chance to hunt real game, it offers that opportunity.

Bob Jones from Goochland County has owned bird dogs since 1962 and entered the trial at Liberty Corners for the first time with

Dwight Dyke

Contestants travel from all over to participate as does Gary Shellman from Maryland, shown here.

Dwight Dyke

Scorekeeper Steve Haynes registers Irving Morel and his German shorthaired pointer, Luney, and Wes Stigall with English pointer Molly.

hunter and dog; only a score and timekeeper who counts the number of shots and number of retrieves.

While there are a few differences between these two trials in scoring methods and the class you and your dog may participate in, the emphasis is to hunt and shoot with your dog—and to have fun doing it. They are designed to simulate hunting conditions and have been formatted to encourage a greater number of participants. For instance, in a NUCS, if you have never participated before you can be placed in the Novice Class. This gives every new participant a chance at winning. But once your dog has placed 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in the Novice Class event, you should move up to the Amateur or Open Class, depending upon the age of your dog. The Amateur Class is for dogs less than 3 years old and Radiant entered his one-year-old standard poodle, Walker.

"We had a blast and will definitely be participating in future events," declared Jason. "I think we did okay for our first competition. Walker found and flushed his first bird in five minutes, and I knocked the rooster down with one shot!"

Marlene Sipes is also an active participant in these trials and has traveled around the country with her husband competing with their Labrador retrievers. "I went to a few tournaments with Richard last spring. I quickly realized how much fun it is to watch the dogs work the field. The tournament hunting is exciting and a great fit for me. Now my husband and I are working and traveling together with the dogs," said Marlene.

As she pointed out, "More wives and his seven-year-old English setter, Jasper. "I think this is a nice event," Bob remarked. "It gives me a chance to walk around. If you are 82 years old, just getting out is a great thing—and to do it with your dog is even better."

As Bob pointed out, the race is not always won by the swift. If you view your prize as just spending one more day, no matter how brief, in the field with your dog—you win!

Clarke C. Jones spends his spare time with his black Labrador retriever, Luke, hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke and Luke on their website at www.clarkecjones.com.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Bird Dog Circuit
Richard Sipes
(434) 962-4049
Richardlcf@Hughes.net

Reaching Out to Am

by Ben Swenson

The Tidewater Kayak Anglers' Association has found a novel way to support the area's veterans.

James "Mac" McGee knew he'd be hurting. The Iraq War veteran knew that sitting in a kayak all day long would be painful. After all, he'd been through years of surgeries and rehabilitation to repair the pelvis he'd broken in three places during his wartime service. Despite the certainty that pain would come, he says, "I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

McGee was one of about twenty wounded warriors out for a day of fishing last September at an event in eastern Virginia growing in popularity every year: the Kayak Fish for Charity Tournament, put on by the Tidewater Kayak Anglers' Association (TKAA, www.tkaa.org).

Kayak fishermen like McGee have found themselves in good company in recent years, their craft buoyed by resources devoted to making this pastime more accessible. Testament to the sport's reputation is the growing esteem TKAA's tournament is garnering among anglers. When the tournament began in 2005, a couple of dozen folks showed up. Seven years later, the number of entrants has swelled dramatically: In 2011, there were 240 anglers. The 8th annual tournament will take place in September 2012 and organizers are expecting at least that many attendees.

Entrants in TKAA's one-day tournament start fishing at sunrise and may put in their kayaks at any public landing in the greater Hampton Roads area. The tournament is catch-and-release; anglers must photograph each fish on a TKAA-supplied ruler they've acquired the night before. Tournament judges verify winning fish by looking over an angler's digital photo card. The day's timing is key, and competitors must take care to be in the check-in line by 4:00 PM. A prize-winning fish didn't make the cut several years ago because the person who landed it made

ERICAN HEROES

an ill-fated decision to pick up a Slurpee after a hard day fishing. He was a few minutes late and didn't make the cut.

There are divisions and prizes for the largest of targeted species: striped bass, flounder, red drum, speckled trout, and a so-called "slam," or combination of the latter three. There's a freshwater division, one for females, and another for youth. The first, second, and third-place prizes awarded in each of these categories come from the largesse of dozens of businesses and individuals. First-place winners in each division often take home a new kayak! Between the prizes awarded for catching remarkable fish and the raffle for the hundreds of other donated kayak fishing accessories, most anglers leave the tournament with something to show for their efforts. Of course, that's not why most folks attend.

"We're here for the prizes. We're here for the fishing. We're here for the camaraderie. But most of all, we're here for the heroes," says Tom VanderHeiden, addressing the mixed crowd of weary and windblown anglers, gathered in a hotel ballroom at the end of a long day. VanderHeiden is coordinator of the Tidewater chapter of Heroes on the Water, or HOW, one of the beneficiaries of the tournament's proceeds. HOW uses kayak fishing to

©Susan & Bobby Bolling Photography

Tournament participant Marcos Rivera familiarizes himself with kayaking before dropping a line. Below, kayaks outfitted by Heroes on the Water and Project Healing Waters sit ready to make a day of fishing possible for wounded warriors.

©Susan & Bobby Bolling Photography

help members of the military who've been injured during the course of their service. The act of kayak fishing speeds along their rehabilitation and reintegration back into society.

While most tournament entrants were far adrift, wetting lines in the hopes of landing a lunker, VanderHeiden and a handful of volunteers escorted a group of wounded warriors out for a day of pleasure fishing in Virginia Beach's Rudee Inlet. It was an eclectic gathering of veterans; most still active in their service, others long since retired. All seemed eager to take to the water.

Israel Ramirez, a 22-year-old lance corporal in the Marines, had never been fishing before, much less from a kayak, but he'd never been one to shy away from a challenge, so when HOW's liaison at Portsmouth Naval Hospital asked him if he'd like to go out, Ramirez jumped at the opportunity. Ramirez thought it would be a nice diversion from the days he was spending recuperating from an injury he sustained while serving aboard the USS Bataan.

"I wasn't nervous, but I knew it would be a little difficult with my hand being broken," says Ramirez, a soft-spoken, courteous California native. Once on the water, however, Ramirez overcame any physical limitation quickly. Call it what you will—persistence, beginner's luck—but Ramirez (who'd never been fishing, mind you) landed four nice fish: three spot and a pinfish.

It wasn't a bad haul for Ramirez and fellow service members, but hooking up was really just the icing on the cake for otherwise active men and women who happen to be sidelined by injury. "Fishing is something that isn't too stressful, doesn't require too much of people," says Ramirez. "I think most important is that it gets people out of their beds or hospital rooms or wherever they happen to be stuck."

It's a sentiment that McGee, who served with the Marines and then the Army during his military career, knows well, and a reason he was so eager to join other service members

Tournament volunteer and blogger Rob Choi helps ready a lure. Right, volunteer Dave Bolster (L) looks over a fish reeled in by participant James "Mac" McGee.

©Susan & Bobby Bolling Photography

©Susan & Bobby Bolling Photography

on the water. "When I was on active duty, and operating a crane, I could see progress. I'd look at a wall at the end of the day and think 'I did that, I accomplished something,'" he says.

But the weeks of protracted, painstaking recuperation and therapy don't offer the same sense of usefulness and gratification, McGee explains. "You feel trapped in your own body. It becomes a daily grind: the doctor, the bed, the pain. And when the fishing comes along, it's a way to take your mind off it, even if it's only for the day."

McGee was sponsored that day by another charity, Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, which, like HOW, coordinates fishing trips for wounded veterans, but uses strictly fly fishing as a method of tackle. These charities rely on donations, like those provided by TKAA's annual tournament, and volunteers, who see to the myriad tasks necessary to get veterans on the water: gathering rods and reels, transporting kayaks, and cutting bait, for instance.

One such unassuming volunteer who worked methodically on the blustery morning of the tournament was 33-year-old Rob Choi, an illustrator from Richmond. Choi is passionate about fishing; he's the author of the blog Angling-Addict (www.angling-addict.com). Last year was his first time as a volunteer with HOW, although he'd fished in the tournament before that. He says that a number of things compelled him to turn from tournament prize-seeker to tournament volunteer.

"It was the perfect opportunity for me to really help someone by sharing the passion I have for this sport," wrote Choi in a blog post a couple of days after the tournament. "And not just anyone, but someone who has put his country before himself... someone who did what our country as a whole needed him to do and now he's stuck in a hospital. I know if I was in his shoes, I'd love it if someone took me fishing."

Choi was paired with Lance Corporal Ramirez on the water the day of the tournament, each in his own kayak. Choi provided knowledge from his wealth of fishing experience when Ramirez needed a little guidance, and let the Marine float and fish on his own when he seemed to have the hang of it. "We worked some on casting and some other techniques," says Choi, "but really I was just more of a chaperone." Throughout the day, Choi occasionally paddled up to Ramirez to offer a tip or two, then let the current take him away, leaving Ramirez to fish on his own.

That type of experience is the essence of both Heroes on the Water and Project Healing Waters. These charities encourage the wounded warriors to do as they wish on the water. If the veterans choose to fish hard for six hours, great. If, on the other hand, they drift along all day, enjoying the freedom and the novelty of the water, and barely drop a line—well that's perfectly fine too. "We give basic safety and fishing instructions and that's more or less it," says HOW's VanderHeiden. "We don't have an agenda. The whole purpose is for the veterans to get out of it what they want to get out of it."

The veterans who arrived at an early-for-a-Saturday 7 o'clock on the morning of the tournament weren't quite sure what to make of their impending fishing experience. A handful raised their hands when VanderHeiden asked who'd never been in a kayak before. But after some basic instructions, the veterans and their volunteers managed to fan out into all the coves and creeks of Rudee Inlet.

Initial wariness faded quickly, and soon the veterans seemed more confident and comfortable on the water. The hours passed quickly, and everyone met back on shore for lunch. As they dined on donated pizza, there were already more than a few stories to tell, more than a little bragging about fish they'd caught and, importantly, more than enough laughter to fill the air over Rudee Inlet.

Ben Swenson is a freelance writer and columnist. He lives in Williamsburg with his wife and two sons.

©Beth Hester

Saltwater Fly F

New environs, new skills, new adventures.

by Beth Hester

I roll-cast a small, sparsely dressed Clouser Minnow across the brackish waters of the canal and begin a slow, steady strip, pausing here and there so the fly can descend intermittently toward the sandy bottom. As my fly edges close to the piling at the far end of the dock, I feel a sharp take, followed by the telltale circular wrangling that tells me I have a flounder on the line. I net the keeper flounder, dispatch it quickly, dredge the fillets lightly in seasoned cornmeal, and let the peanut oil sizzle. I bask in an uncharacteristically smuggish glow.

Admittedly, the fly on which the fish was taken was not particularly complex, but the white and tan combo with wisps of copper flash was my own creation. New to fly fishing, I reeled in dinner—fresh from local waters. The time from net to skillet: less than 20 minutes. There's still so much to learn, but that's part of the adventure, and fly fishing in salt continues to present me with new and increasingly satisfying fishing opportunities and challenges.

But then rare is the angler who wouldn't jump at the opportunity to expand his or her fishing range and repertoire, and the experience of fly fishing Virginia's coastal waters can be just the ticket. There is the anticipation of exploring new environs and the gratification of mastering new fly patterns and utilizing new fly-tying materials. For anglers accustomed to the intimacy of small streams and bijou trout, the exhilaration of plying Virginia's vast, briny waters can exponentially increase fishing enjoyment.

Our commonwealth has thousands of miles of tantalizing shoreline: tidal bays, ocean, inland bays, and lagoons. The shoreline of the tidal portions of Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries alone stretches 7,213 miles. Accordingly, we'd be remiss not to encourage anglers to reach beyond inland waters from time to time, and it's helpful for the beginning coastal fly angler to seek direction from local subject-matter experts. There are several, well-established saltwater angling organizations in Virginia, and many of their members fly fish, but the Virginia Coastal Fly Anglers (VCFA) saltwater fly fishing organization established in1997 has a single-minded vision: *"To encourage the development of saltwater fly fishing in the lower Chesapeake Bay and adjacent waters."*

The VCFA fosters a collective learning environment. They have established a newsletter, speaker's programs, skill development "schools" (knot tying, rigging, info on places to fish, fly tying, casting, etc.), mentoring programs, and monthly fly-tying instruction. Its members are actively involved in local river and Chesapeake Bay-wide stewardship initiatives and also serve the community by developing youth-targeted programs. So with helpful observations from longtime members Ron Russell, Kevin DuBois, Mike Buss, and Kendall Osborne, we're encouraging readers to cast outside their comfort zones and experience fly fishing along Virginia's coastline.

The Tackle

There are rods and reels specifically designed to withstand the rigors of angling in salt, and line and leader configurations intended to

©Beth Hester

Left, "fish bling." Here, an 8-weight combo is a great all-around choice for a variety of saltwater fish species.

shing Beckons

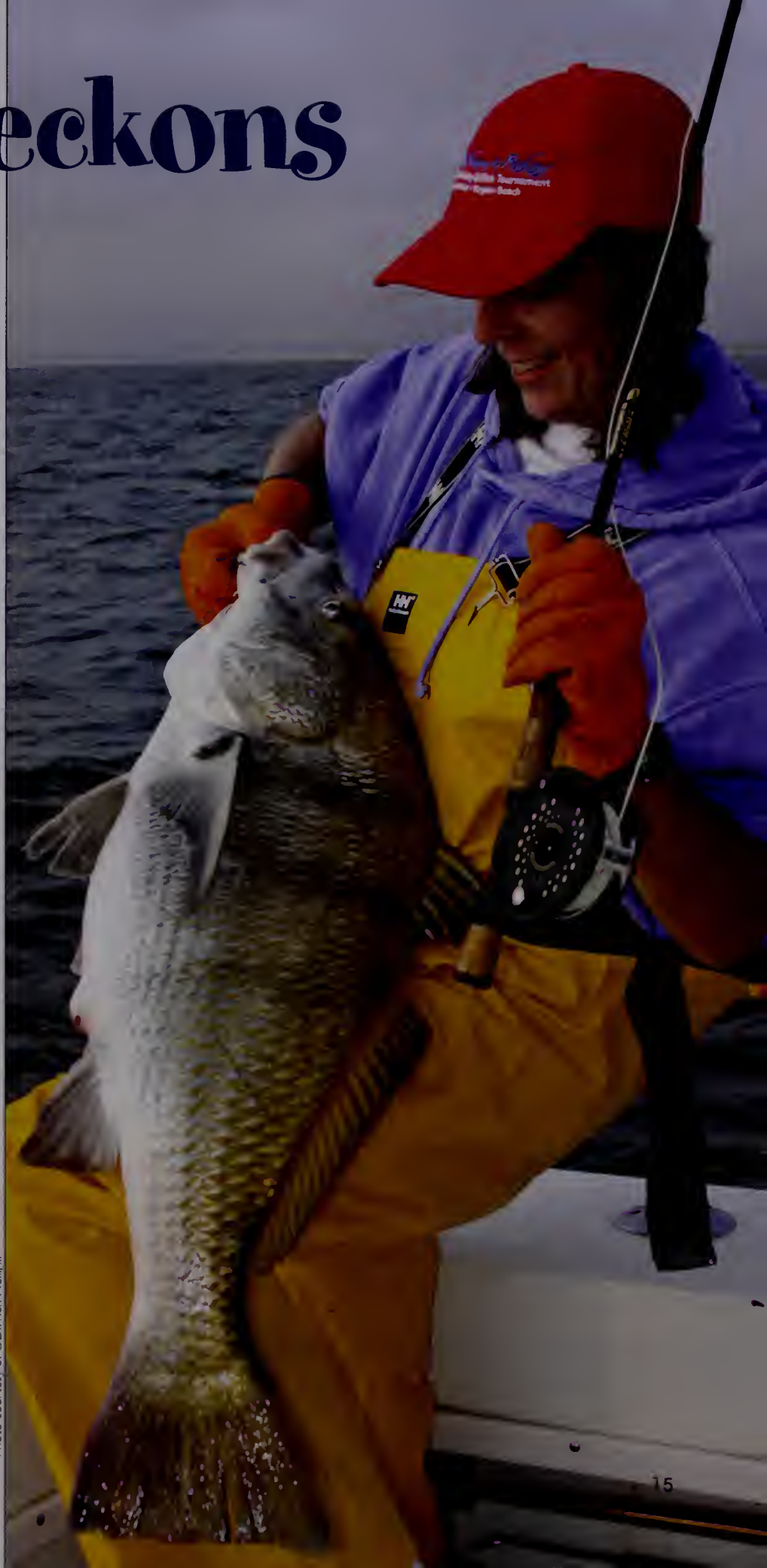
help anglers cast larger flies with power and accuracy in conditions where winds and waves can pose a challenge. In general, weight-forward, floating lines are appropriate for wade fishing and many inshore situations, but here are some general guidelines.

Kevin DuBois has a few suggestions: "Inshore, rods from 6 to 9 weights will do the trick. For larger striped bass, big red, and black drum, and the occasional crevalle jack or false albacore, 10 to 11-weight rods are best. Just about any reel is sufficient for inshore action. But big fish will test tackle so bring top-notch gear when chasing larger fish or heading offshore. Because of the variety of depths providing fishing opportunity, it's best to have both a fast sinking and an intermediate sinking line handy (on interchangeable spools). Floating lines can be used, but an intermediate line will cover the same fishing situations effectively and provide greater versatility."

Wade-fishing advocate Mike Buss suggests a floating or intermediate weight-forward line, or for versatility, any one of the multi-tip lines that connect with a series of loops. In addition, when wade fishing or casting from the surf, an ergonomically correct stripping basket can help control line and avoid snarls.

Offshore rods are more often in the 10- to 12-weight range, with sturdy fighting butts, and the reels need to be beefier, with drags designed to handle robust, hard-fighting fish, and arbors large enough to hold at least 200 yards of backing and the line. Mid- and larger arbor reels can help optimize line retrieval.

Leaders don't have to be complicated affairs. Many saltwater species aren't particularly spooked by leaders. Kevin explains: "Most of the time I have a 12" butt section of 20lb test connected to a 5- to 6-foot section of 8lb test—not a whole lot of tapering with a multitude of different tests and diameters. There are only a few



Tricia Neill with black drum caught around Chesapeak Bay Bridge-Tunnel.

Photo courtesy of ©Dr. Ken Neill, III

special circumstances when you need to deviate from a simple leader formula."

Bottom line: Your gear selections needn't break the bank, and your lines and leaders need not be painfully intricate. However, all components—reel, reel seats, and guides—should be corrosion-resistant. Some specialty fly lines are designed to cast consistently well in the hot, semi-tropical heat of the summer coast, other models are designed for colder waters or for specific quarry such as striper. The most trusted and well-known purveyors of fly-fishing equipment have quality equipment at various price points. Purchasing your gear from local shops means on-the-spot expert advice and the ability to cast before you buy.

The Flies

You need only a handful of saltwater flies to get started, and if you begin by learning to tie only one fly, the Clouser Minnow in a few different sizes and color variations, you'll have yourself a fly that will cover a host of applications. Tying materials for salty flies are fun and easy to handle, with color combinations ranging from the understated to the unbelievably gaudy. Once a few basic patterns are mastered, it's enjoyable to create Velcro dot crabs, Deceivers, squid, shrimp, and various baitfish imitations. The only limit is your imagination and the requirements of your targeted quarry.

In the two-volume set, *Flies of the Chesapeake*, VCFA past-president Larry Clemmons and member Jeff DuBinok collected and compiled step-by-step, fly-tying instructions for classic, inshore, and specialty flies for use on the lower Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and surrounding Atlantic coast. These flies are designed to target the most commonly encountered species. This set is a labor of love, and details may be accessed on their website, at www.vcfa.org.

Knots: Keeping It Simple

Mike Buss on knots: "Try to keep things simple as far as knots go. I do a lot of fishing at night and want to keep my knots so simple that I can tie them with my eyes closed since I will be fishing with limited visibility. I use a double surgeon's knot to make my loops and a non-slip loop knot to tie my fly to my leader. I have a loop in the end of my fly line and I connect my leader to my fly line with a loop-to-loop connection. As a result, I only need two knots for my connections.

The Wade-fishing Experience

"I love to fish because of the tranquility I experience," says Mike Buss. "When I am wade-fishing, I become a part of nature, blending in and becoming a part of the fish's environment." Favorite wading locations as cited by VCFA members include:

- The Lynnhaven River on the Pleasure House Road property and the slough between that property and the marsh island to the sea;
- The Lynnhaven Inlet by the Lessner Bridge;
- In Norfolk, also in the autumn, good fishing with easy access around the breakwaters of East Ocean View (24th–28th streets);
- Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore, an excellent place to fish from shore early in the morning and at dusk; and
- The shore in front of the Cape Henry lighthouse.

Saltwater Quarry Through The Seasons

Although anglers can fish coastal Virginia throughout the year, some months are better than others due in part to water temperatures and migration patterns. Here, Ron Russell passes on information about the quarry that can be found during prime fishing months.

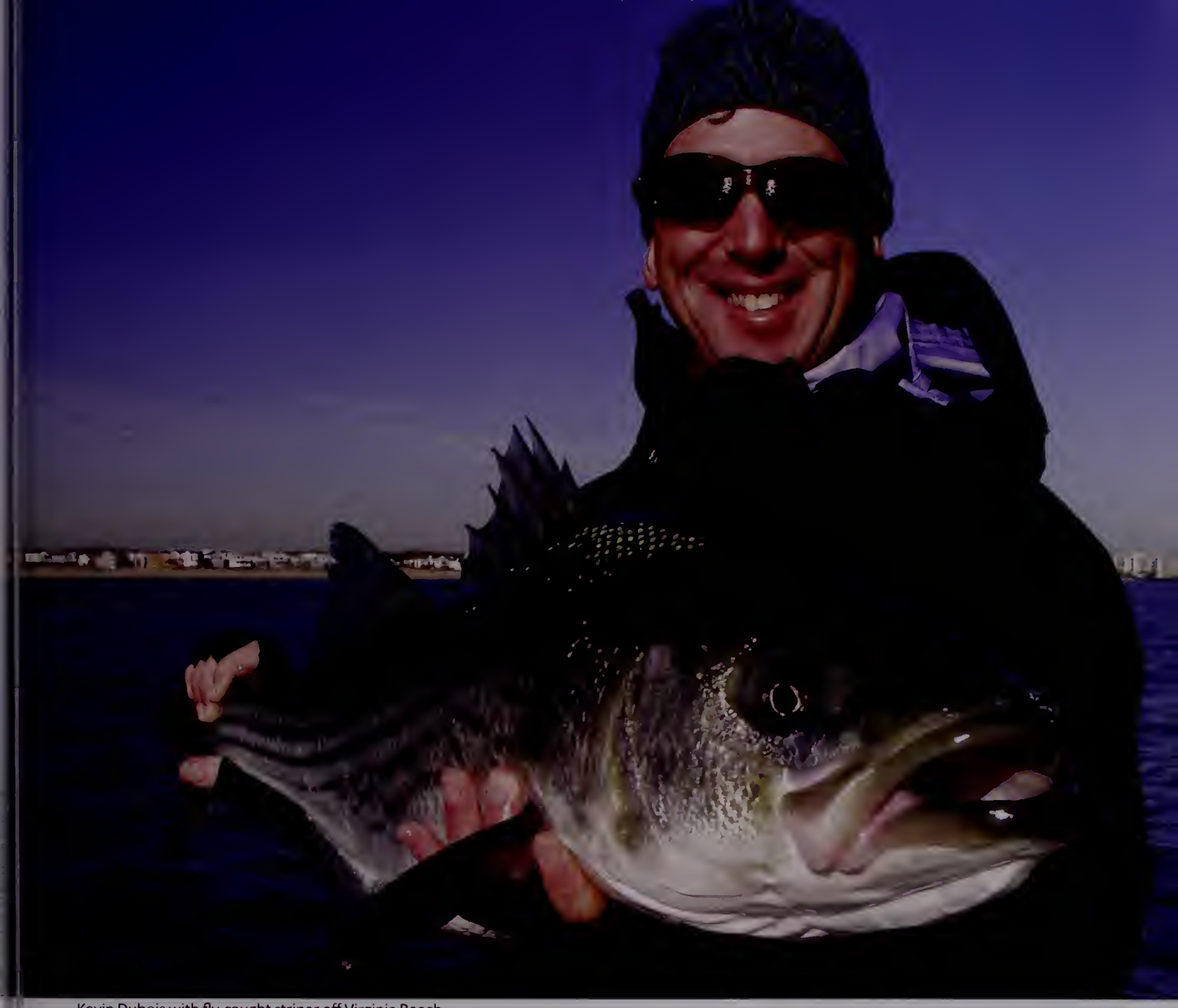
- MAY gets serious with flounder, croaker, and school-sized stripers showing up around structure and inlets. Good fishing this time of year is inside Lynnhaven Inlet, Rudee Inlet, Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, seaside of the Eastern Shore, and mouths of any river coming into the bay. Late May sees an influx of red drum, black drum, and good-sized striped bass about the time that the blue crabs are in their first shedding (first full moon of the month).
- JUNE is the time for most all species (stripers, bluefish, drum, speckled trout, flounder, croaker, and cobia) to be in the lower reaches of the bay. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (CBBT) is a fish magnet most of the warm months, with the inlets seeing smaller fish of all species. Offshore species can begin to show with tuna, cobia, and bluefish.
- JULY and AUGUST are stable months for what arrived in June, except for a rare opportunity to catch a tarpon on the seaside of the Eastern Shore. There is a chance you may find Spanish mackerel in the current rips of the CBBT and around the Cape Henry point.
- SEPTEMBER finds species congregating in the lower bay migrating south or east. The beginning of migration means heavier concentrations of fish in all areas. Speckled trout can be found in the inlets and shorelines that have marshy waters of 4 to 8 feet in depth. Small bluefish are abundant, small-class striped bass are massing up around the CBBT, cobia are on the run south, stopping at channel markers to eat, big drum are moving out of the bay, and flounder are headed east.

©Beth Hester

A coastal angler's arsenal.

Photo courtesy of © The Orvis Company

An ergonomically correct stripping basket controls line, minimizing snarls.



Kevin Dubois with fly-caught striper off Virginia Beach.

- OCTOBER finds the migration in full swing, and the lower bay is alive with activity of speckled trout. Bluefish, school stripers, speckled trout, flounder, spot, croaker, and smaller drum are getting ready for the journey south.
- NOVEMBER and DECEMBER are striped bass months, with fish feeding on schools of bait scattered in the lower bay and around the CBBT.

Experience the Excitement

So whether you're surf casting along the beach, fishing the lower bay and its tributaries in kayaks or other small craft, wade-fishing, or scheduling a once-in-a-lifetime offshore charter for bigger game fish, all saltwater fly fishing in Virginia has its charms.

Kendall Osborne explains why he relishes the excitement of saltwater fly fishing: "I grew up catching bass and bluegills and have caught freshwater trout on fly, but saltwater fish have power and mass that cannot be appreciated until experienced. I love to freshwater fish, but the reality is the saltwater fish are more powerful by far—even a one-pound croaker blasts a one-pound largemouth."

It's easy for Virginia anglers to experience this power and excitement for themselves; all it takes is a saltwater fishing license, moderately-priced tackle, a handful of flies, the curiosity to scope out new territory, and an openness to learning new skills. Take good care of your equipment, and only keep legal-sized fish. Why not join a saltwater fly-fishing club, attend a casting clinic, or seek out a mentor? You might make a few new angling friends in the process.

Beth Hester is a writer and freelance photographer from Portsmouth. Her passions include reading, shooting, kayaking, fishing, tying saltwater flies, and tending her herb garden.

©Bill Lea

Virginia's Watery W

by Glenda C. Booth

When Colonel William Byrd II surveyed eastern Virginia in 1728, he named the then one-million-acre wetland near today's Suffolk the Dismal Swamp, which signified an alliance with Satan. He wrote, "The foul damps ascent without ceasing, corrupt the air, and render it unfit for respiration." In the 1800s, the freshwater tidal wetland just south of Alexandria, today's Dyke Marsh, was called Hell Hole.

For many years, wetlands were the unwanted stepchild of nature, seen as murky, inhospitable, mosquito-ridden wastelands, stagnant holes of muck permeated by dense, dank air. Viewed as "useless" to humans, they often became dumps, sewage lagoons, or places to fill, drain, or "reclaim."

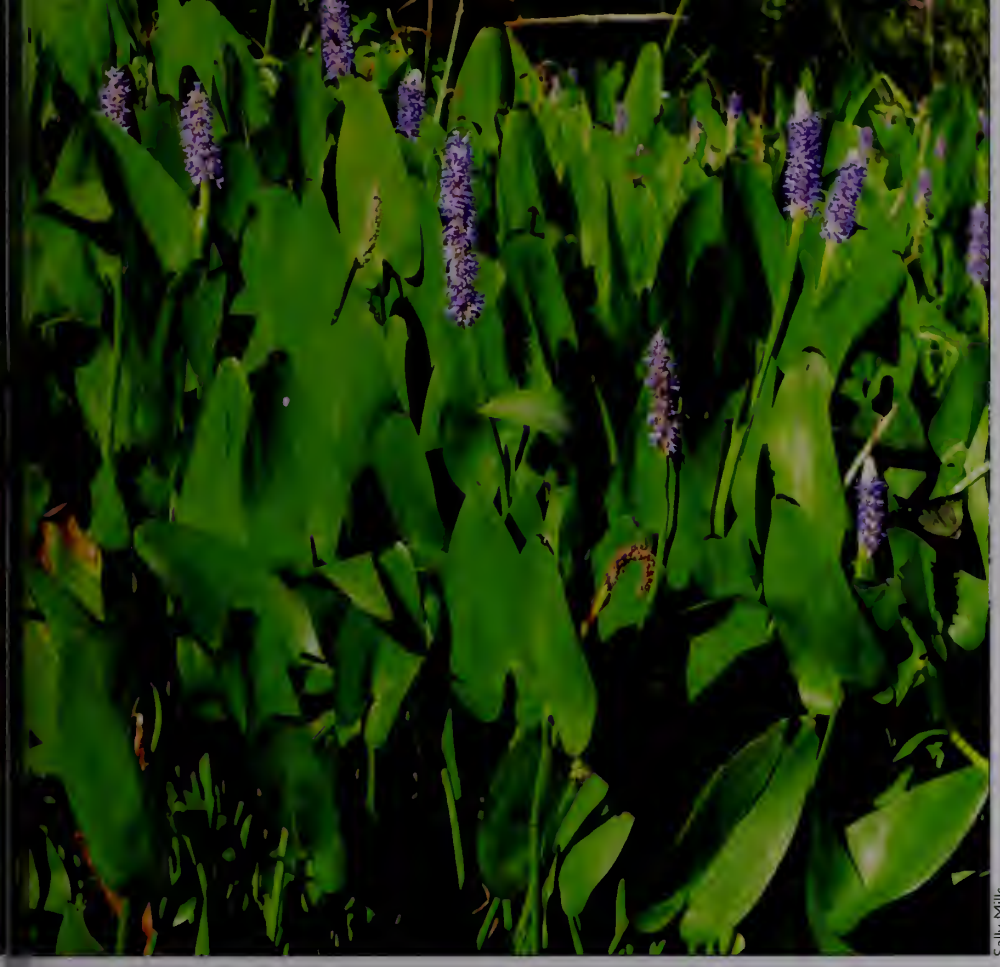
A wetland can be called a marsh, swamp, bog, fen, pocosin, vernal pool, or mudflat, among other terms. Wetlands are a transition zone between water and land and are often, but not always, wet. "In some cases, it will not be immediately obvious that a wetland exists," states the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) website. Here is DEQ's definition:

'Wetland' means those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. An area is considered a wetland in Virginia if it exhibits wetland *hydrology*, hydric *soils,* and a prevalence of wetland *vegetation*.

Each wetland type is a combination of soil, hydrology, vegetation, and other characteristics. These "biological supermarkets" are among the most productive habitats on Earth. "In an area roughly the size of an average desk top, there can be as many as 8,300 animals," says Kirk Havens, who directs the Coastal Watersheds Program at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS).

And from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC): "Marine resources are finite, provide many valuable services and products, and are delicately balanced in an intricate web of biological and physical interactions. Permanent loss of these resources and unnecessary alterations jeopardize this delicate ecological balance."

Wetlands cover around five percent of the country's land surface but are home to 31 percent of plant species and more than one-third of threatened and endangered species. Of Virginia's wetlands, about 75 percent are nontidal, found primarily in bottomlands



Sally Mills

onderlands

and the floodplains along stream channels. By contrast, tidal wetlands are distributed along the state's 5,000 miles of shoreline, lined with marshes, beaches, and mudflats. Around 75 percent of all wetlands in the state are privately owned.

Free Ecological Services

Wetlands provide many ecological services—for free. Called "nature's kidneys," they enhance water quality by filtering out pollutants. They also help stabilize shorelines, attenuate tidal energy, stem erosion, and control flooding by trapping and slowly releasing water like a sponge. And, well known by outdoorsmen, wetlands offer aesthetic and recreational opportunities—from waterfowl hunting to frog watching.

"Wetlands are critical waterfowl habitat," notes the website of Ducks Unlimited. "Every species of duck, goose, and swan in North America depends on wetland habitat throughout their life cycle."

Many fish raise their young here. "Wetlands provide an essential link in the life cycle of 75 percent of the fish and shellfish commercially harvested in the U.S., and up to 90 percent of the recreational fish catch," reports the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Because of these myriad natural services, wetlands have tremendous economic value, with one estimate by the EPA at $14.9 trillion worldwide.

Wetlands Lost

Since colonial times, the contiguous United States has lost around 53 percent of its wetlands, having dropped from 221 million acres in the early 1600s to just over 110 million in 2009, the most recent data available. Around 40 to 45 percent of Virginia's wetlands have vanished during that period.

"Wetlands are at a tipping point," U.S. Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar has said. "While we have made great strides in conserving and restoring wetlands since the 1950s, when we were losing an area equal to half the size of Rhode Island each year, we remain on a downward trend that is alarming."

A 2009 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report reveals an annual loss of 59,000 acres of wetlands in the coastal watersheds of the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Great Lakes from 1998 to 2004. An estimated 18 percent of these losses occurred in tidal salt marshes, and the remaining 82 percent occurred in upland marshes and forested wetlands of the watersheds. These numbers "... underscore the importance of moving quickly to protect, conserve, and restore these vital coastal areas before they are lost forever," stresses Salazar.

Wetland loss is concentrated in coastal watersheds due to the large number of people living in and moving to coastal areas. More than half of the American population now lives in coastal counties at densities approximately five times greater than inland counties, according to the Fish & Wildlife Service.

Threats to Wetlands

Land-use practices, chiefly development of many kinds, represent a major threat to wetlands. "Human activities cause wetland degradation and loss by changing water quality, quantity, and flow rates, increasing pollutant

Sally Mills

Yellow perch are among the many fish that thrive when wetlands, and water quality, are protected.

inputs; and changing species composition as a result of disturbance and the introduction of nonnative species," states EPA's website. Common activities that can harm wetlands include depositing fill, draining for development or farming, channelizing streams, diking, damming, and expanding impervious surfaces, which increase pollution.

Another threat, nonnative plants like purple loosestrife *(Lythrum salicaria)* and phragmites *(Phragmites australis)* introduced to these ecosystems often out-compete and destroy native wetland plants and thereby lower biodiversity.

Carl Hershner, director of the Center for Coastal Resources Management at VIMS, predicts that sea level rise will be between one and two feet over the next 50 years along Virginia's coast. That matches a similar estimate by the 2009 Virginia Commission on Climate Change of a 2.3 to 5.2 feet rise per century. At that rate, the state could lose between 50 and 80 percent of its tidal wetlands, cautions Skip Stiles of Wetlands Watch, a commissioner. The commission's predicted rate of rise "is a death sentence to the low-lying shorelines, dunes, and wetlands found within a few feet of sea level," says Stiles.

"A healthy tidal wetland accumulates enough plant material and sediment to move vertically, but our wetlands are under stress, limiting their elevation. With a two-foot-plus rise, wetlands that can't keep up must retreat into upland areas. And when those upland areas are built out, bulkheaded, or hardened, that retreat is blocked and the wetlands will drown in place," he maintains.

The commission urged that the state develop a Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategy and recommended that local governments in coastal areas include climate change impacts—especially sea level rise and storm surge—in land-use plans, ordinances, and shoreline management plans.

Sally Mills

The white hibiscus plant, left, and wild rice and arrow ar

Morgan Dellamure

Wetlands Permits

Virginia issues permits for certain activities in wetlands through two programs: the Virginia Water Protection Program, administered by DEQ, and the Tidal Wetlands Program, managed by VMRC and local wetlands boards. Generally, in Virginia, a permit is required for wetland-disturbing activities like dredging, filling, or altering.

To stabilize tidal shorelines, Virginia's policies are increasingly discouraging the use of hard structures like riprap revetments (of rock), bulkheads, and sea walls in wetlands and instead encouraging what are called "living shorelines" where they can be effective. Living shorelines are non-structural approaches that include plants, stone, sand fill, and bioengineered materials. Such methods seek to support natural processes and not sever the connections between uplands and aquatic areas. Living shorelines aim to maintain the benefits to wildlife and water quality that a natural shoreline provides.

RESOURCES

* Wetlands Functions and Values:
  www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/pdf/fun_val.pdf and
  http://water.usgs.gov/nwsum/WSP2425/functions.html
* Wetlands and Stream Protection:
  www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WetlandsStreams.aspx
* Conserving Habitat for Waterfowl:
  www.ducks.org/conservation/how-we-conserve/conservation-priority-areas
* Living Shorelines:
  http://ccrm.vims.edu/livingshorelines/index.html or
  www.cbf.org/Document.Doc?id=60
* Wetlands Regulation and Advocacy: www.wetlandswatch.org

ve indicate a healthy freshwater wetland.

restoring 6,000 new acres of wetlands within the Chesapeake Bay watershed by June 2010, as part of the 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement. While not quite there, the good news is that DEQ has tracked a net gain of 7,191 acres of nontidal wetlands and a net gain of 1,473 new acres of tidal and nontidal wetlands between 2001 and 2011, according to Dave Davis, director of DEQ's Office of Wetlands and Stream Protection. In the Chesapeake Bay watershed, Virginia has restored 1,564 acres since 1998, reports the Chesapeake Bay Program. This is important because about half of the state is drained by Chesapeake Bay rivers. The DEQ numbers do not reflect all wetlands created or restored in Virginia, Davis cautions.

Significant wetland areas have been improved through funds provided by Duck Stamp sales; others have been protected by this Department through the acquisition of wildlife management areas (WMAs). Recent examples include the 2,500-acre Mattaponi WMA in Caroline County and the 300-acre Merrimac Farm WMA in Prince William County. And through a generous grant from the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program and partnership with the City of Virginia Beach, DGIF holds a conservation easement at Pleasure House Point overlooking Lynnhaven Bay. More than 80 acres of tidal wetlands and maritime forest important to the ecological productivity of the Lynnhaven River system are now protected from future development.

Think Positively

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle called the wetland where the villain met his fate a "dark, quivering mire" of "miasmatic vapor" and "slimy water plants." Today, thankfully, wetlands have a new image.

If you think wetlands, think Monet's water lilies, delicately swirling dragonflies, shimmering minnows, or newborn wood ducks catapulting into a wetland for the first time. Indeed, wetlands are rich biological laboratories of life.

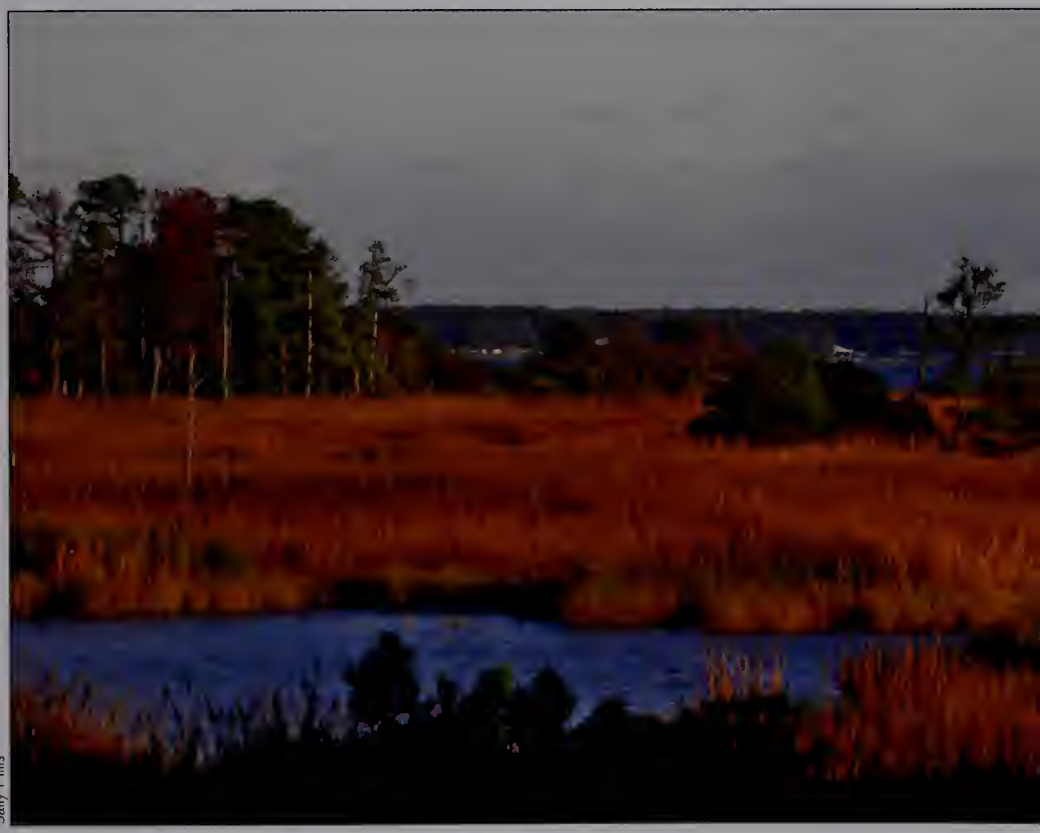
Glenda C Booth, a freelance writer, grew up in Southwest Virginia and has lived in Northern Virginia over 30 years, where she is active in conservation efforts.

In a progressive move in 2011, Virginia declared as policy that the state prefers living shorelines to stabilize shoreline erosion in tidal wetlands. VMRC is implementing this law and local governments are required to include coastal resources management in their comprehensive plans. VIMS is currently preparing guidance for Tidewater localities that will offer an ecosystem-based approach to managing coastal resources.

Wetlands Compensation and Mitigation

The commonwealth has committed to "no net loss" of wetlands. DEQ's website states that "...wetlands that are lost or destroyed by development activities, such as building, must be replaced so that the overall amount of wetland acreage does not decline." The person causing the impact may be required to create, restore, or enhance wetlands through what is called compensatory mitigation. This generally can be accomplished through restoration, creation, purchase of mitigation bank credits, or contribution of an in-lieu fee.

Virginia committed to a net gain of 10,000 acres of wetlands by 2010 and to



Sally Mills

This grassy marsh along the lower James River attracts a host of ducks and small mammals, and is an important nursery area for fish and birds.

A QUEST

by King Montgomery

The May 8, 2012 *Washington Post* headline with accompanying photograph caught my eye as I took another sip of early morning coffee: "N. Va. Angler snags a snakefish—and maybe a record," by J. Freedom du Lac.

A sport fisherman named Juan Duran caught an 18-pound, almost 4-ounce Northern snakehead (NSH) while bass fishing in the Occoquan River, a Virginia tributary of the tidal Potomac River. The current world record is a 17-pound, 4-ounce NSH caught in Japan. Duran hooked his fish on a Kinky Beaver lure, a 4.2-inch soft plastic flipping bait. The fish probably won't qualify for an International Game Fish Association (IGFA) record because measuring and witnessing protocols were not followed.

Duran, naturally, was thrilled with his unexpected catch. While bass fishing he'd landed five other smaller snakeheads that ended up on dinner plates. The writer quoted Duran on his impression of snakeheads: "...they look really cool. They're like rattlesnakes with fins."

About five weeks after Duran's enviable catch, the *Post's* Daryl Fears followed up with "Setting out after snakeheads," an article about a two-day NSH tournament staged from Maryland's Smallwood State Park on Mattawoman Creek, another tributary of the Potomac just across the river from Virginia's Leesylvania State Park.

The event drew 110 participants and netted just over 1,400 pounds of snakeheads. What made the event unique: The fish were

FOR SNAKEHEADS

taken using bows and crossbows, mostly at night with lights from the boat to spot the fish in the shallows. The winning team nabbed 25 fish for 230 pounds, earning the five men a $1,500 first-place prize. A team of youngsters, none over 16 years, captured second place for $585, reported Fears.

In Virginia waters, "Bow and arrow may be used to take common carp, northern snakehead, and gar (fishing license required) during day and night hours (24 hrs.), except from waters stocked with trout. Spearguns and poisoned arrows are prohibited. Snakeheads must be immediately killed and reported to VDGIF." (From the Department's freshwater fishing regulations.)

©King Montgomery

Capt. Steve Chaconas (L) and DGIF fisheries biologist John Odenkirk (also shown on pg. 22) cast the shoreline of Little Hunting Creek for snakeheads.

Taking Snakeheads

It seems fishing for Northern snakeheads with bass fishing tackle and bows or crossbows is getting more popular. Their numbers continue to rise from that initial encounter with the exotic species in 2004 when a bass fisherman hooked one in the back of Virginia's Little Hunting Creek. The fact that snakeheads taste darn good might help with removing at least some of the population.

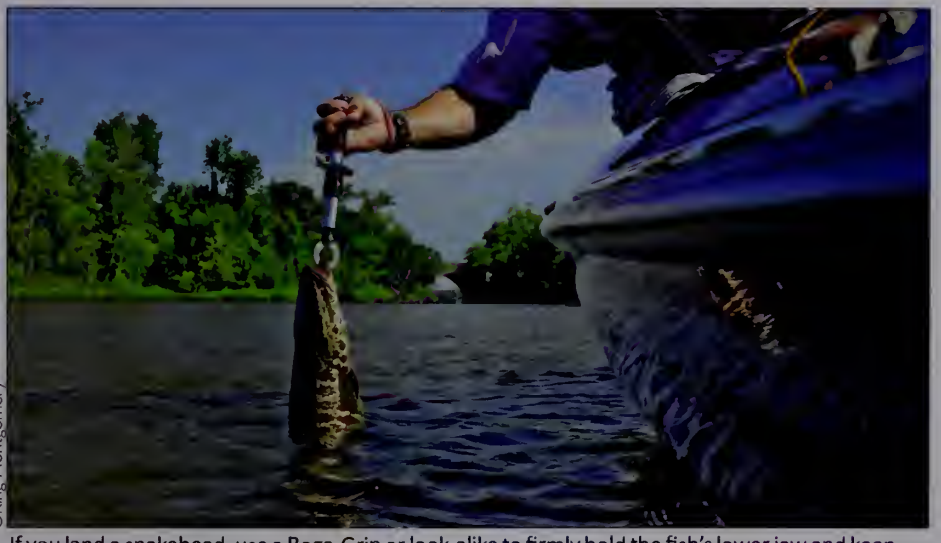
"Get that dang trash fish off my lure," I joked with Captain Mike Starrett, a longtime Potomac River fishing guide and friend. We were on Mattawomen Creek late in the day and the nearly 4-pound largemouth bass had exploded on my black surface frog pattern. This evening I wanted to catch some NSH, but the bass kept getting in the way.

Suddenly the light dimmed and clouds moved in as darkness approached. It would have been a great time for NSH (and bass) fishing since both species seem to get active at night. But off in the distance over the main stem of the Potomac in Virginia, lightning began streaking the skies and it was time to get off the water. (Even if lightning is a long way off, if you are in a boat it's time to leave, particularly when you're waving a graphite rod around. It is an efficient lightning rod and seriously could light up your life and end it if the supercharged electricity hits it.)

NSH are found in the same habitat as largemouth bass. From spring through fall many fish are in the backs of tributary rivers and creeks, and in shallow bays out of the main current as the tide ebbs and flows four times a day. And both species are active at night and during other periods of limited visibility.

Both species spawn in the spring depending on water temperatures, and the NSH is known to reproduce more than once a year if conditions are good. I don't like to fish bass on the spawning redds, but snakes are another matter. NSH are good parents and protect their spawn from predators for several weeks after the baby snakeheads hatch. This is a good time to catch NSH because they are aggressive toward intruders that mess with their young, and will hit lures or flies more easily. Still, they are not an easy fish to catch.

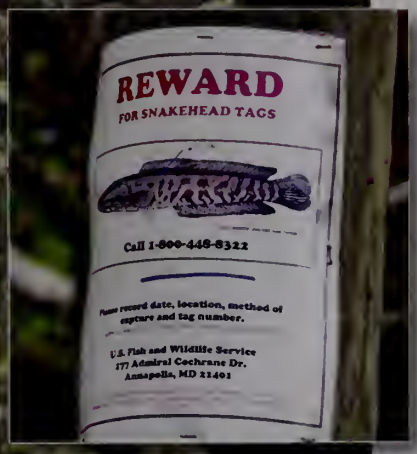
NSH and bass are active predators that eat much the same things: smaller fishes, amphibians and reptiles, crustaceans, insects, and, yes, each other. And NSH and bass will



©King Montgomery

If you land a snakehead, use a Boga-Grip or look-alike to firmly hold the fish's lower jaw and keep your hand away from the teeth.

©King Montgomery



©King Montgomery

©King Montgomery

Top, banded killifish are the meal of choice for most snakeheads that underwent stomach content analysis. Middle, report tagged NSH to the phone number on the dorsal tag. Bottom, a young NSH shocked up in 2011. The fish are prolific breeders.

©King Montgomery

feed on the young of their own species. Bass tournament anglers catch their share of snakeheads and, interestingly, report that largemouth bass sometimes regurgitate baby NSH when brought into the boat. As of now, stomach content analysis of NSH shows less than one percent of their diet is largemouth bass, but more conclusive data are needed.

Since fish seem to be the main ingredient on the snakehead's menu, it stands to reason that a good lure or fly that mimics those fishes are a good bet for enticing the fish to bite. Here, I'm talking about Rapalas and other shallow jerkbaits and shallow diving crankbaits. Spinnerbaits and plastic worms and grubs work, too.

Standard river largemouth bass tackle in spinning, casting, and fly is just fine for NSH. Don't go too light because snakeheads hang out around submersed and emergent aquatic vegetation as well as man-made structure such as boat docks and bridge pilings. Fly fishers need a sturdy 8- or even a 9-weight rod with a weight forward floating line. Use a 7- to 9-foot-long leader and either add a 20- or 30-pound test bite tippet, or tie on a 6-inch piece of wire that easily can be tied to the leader. I use TyGer Wire and highly recommend it for these toothsome critters.

Where to Fish

NSH are in the main stem of the Potomac River, particularly in the shallower areas where hydrilla and/or milfoil abound. But that's a lot of water to cover, and anglers are better off fishing the creeks where it's easier to concentrate effort; you can also get by with a smaller boat such as a canoe or kayak with or without an electric trolling motor.

Some of the creeks and rivers that hold NSH in large numbers are Little Hunting Creek, Dogue Creek, Pohick Bay, and the Occoquan and Aquia rivers. There are various county, state, and federal boat launch ramps in this stretch of the Potomac.

You will need a boat because land access to the river and tributaries is very difficult. Those who opt for canoes and kayaks should stay in the creeks and not venture out onto the main river. There are times when the tides pull harder than you can row or paddle.

Cast a lure or fly—and I'm sure legal live or cut bait would work as well—along the clusters of spatterdock that line most of the creeks. At higher tides, the fish are back in the pads, and they move out with a dropping tide. Frog lures that ride with two hooks facing up along a plastic body are great for this fish.

Respected bass fishing guide Captain Steve Chaconas of Capital Bass Guide Service takes a number of clients out for snakeheads and the floating frog lures seem to work best, particularly since they can skim along the top of grassbeds that grow near the surface as summer progresses. Many of his clients get into snakeheads and virtually all catch largemouth bass, and that's a pretty good deal.

Once you land a snakehead, kill it for dinner. Call the Snakehead Hotline at (804) 367-2925 to report the catch and your possession of it. If the fish has a tag sticking out of its back near the dorsal fin, report the number and location information as well.

In Maryland waters, you must kill the fish and either dispose of the carcass or fillet it on the boat or take the fish home. Remember, it is against federal and state laws to transport live snakeheads anywhere.

Outdoors/travel writer & photographer King Montgomery is a former captain who guided light tackle and fly anglers on the tidal Potomac River. Contact him at Kingangler1@aol.com.

RESOURCES

Before you fish, check out:

- Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Fishing Regulations www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources Regulations www.dnr.state.md.us/fisheries/regulations/regindex.asp
- If you fish in Washington, DC waters (roughly from Woodrow Wilson Bridge to Little Falls), see http://ddoe.dc.gov/service/regulated-fishing-activities
- Ken Penrod's *Potomac River Bible*, Volume II, (301) 937-0010, www.penrodsguides.com

These guides target snakeheads:

- Capt. Steve Chaconas, (703) 380-7119, www.nationalbass.com
- Capt. Dave Kerrigan, (301) 252-5322, dkerrigan@bilmin.com
- Capt. Mike Starrett, (301)203-0961, www.indianheadcharters.com
- Rob Snowhite, (703) 401-6429, www.robsnowhite.com

Habitat, Where the Fish Are At!

Fisheries biologists enhance lakes across Virginia for angling success.

by John Copeland

Have you ever fished a Virginia lake and wondered, "Where are the fish?" Department fisheries biologists in all corners of the commonwealth work to develop habitat that provides fish with cover and concentrates them for anglers. Many Virginia lakes were cleared during construction and never had good habitat, so adding it brings good results. Other lakes are old, and old habitat needs refreshing. While fish populations are controlled by bigger factors than just habitat—like available nutrients, protective regulations, consistent spawning, proper predator and prey balance—adding habitat may help anglers catch fish consistently.

Governing Fish Habitat Work

Navigable waterways are governed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). Other waters—Smith Mountain Lake, Lake Anna, South Holston Lake, and Claytor Lake, to name a few—are controlled by private companies or government agencies that produce electricity. Permits are required to perform fish habitat projects in order to prevent navigational hazards, and the Corps issues such permits for the work coordinated by Department (DGIF) biologists.

Eastern Virginia

Eastern Virginia is dotted with small lakes. DGIF fisheries biologist Chad Boyce worked with Girl Scouts at Oak Grove Lake in Chesapeake to install 60 "spider blocks" at four fish reef sites. The spider blocks resemble small, underwater bushes and offer hiding places for bass, crappie, and sunfish. They are easily made from individual concrete blocks, with 3- to 5-foot sections of 1- to 2-inch-diameter polyethylene pipe cemented into the open areas of the blocks. Boyce also completed a similar project with the Suffolk Parks and Recreation Department and local Boy Scouts at the Lone Star Lakes in Suffolk.

Northern Virginia

Fredericksburg biologists John Odenkirk and Steve Owens oversee one of the longest-running fish habitat projects in the commonwealth at Lake Anna, building upon work by colleague Ed Steinkoenig in the late 1970s

The multiple, deepwater sites developed at Lake Anna were largely due to the efforts of Chris McCotter (McCotter's Guide Service), who organized donations to purchase Berkley "Fish-Habs®" and volunteers to assemble them. The 4' x 4' Fish-Habs® cubes are assembled on land (avoiding extreme air temperatures), then sunk into areas with little fish cover at 12- to 26-foot depths. Sites are marked with buoys and their GPS locations are available on the Department's Lake Anna web page.

One unique aspect of this project is the use of SCUBA to evaluate fish. The top species using Fish-Habs® were largemouth bass, black crappie, and bluegill. Odenkirk and Owens found that bass, crappie, redear sunfish, white catfish, and channel catfish preferred horizontal slat alignments, while bluegill used either horizontal or vertical ones. Slats were therefore aligned either horizontally or vertically. One lesson learned by Odenkirk is that the more complex sites covering the largest area hold the most fish. Odenkirk confirmed what many anglers know intuitively: jumbled messes that mimic natural habitat are better for fish.

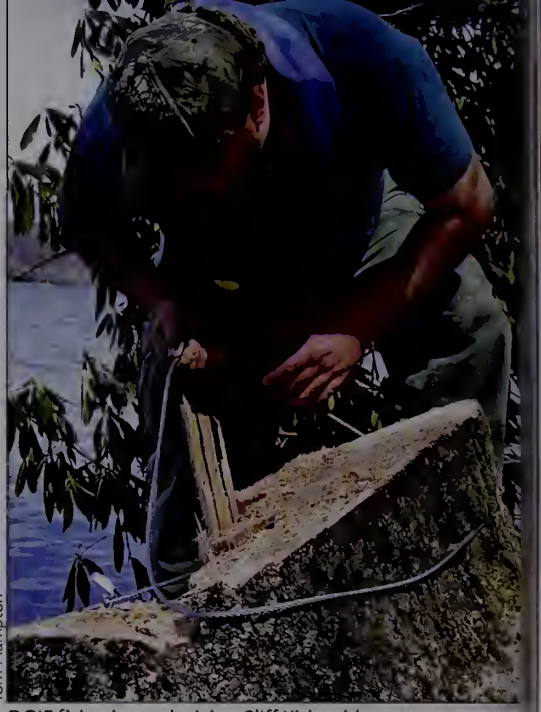
Western Virginia

At Smith Mountain Lake, Lynchburg biologist Dan Wilson told me a new habitat project has been developed through the federal relicensing process for the lake's hydropower dam. Appalachian Power Company is creating a streamlined permit process to allow conservation groups and landowners to perform fish habitat work that had not been previously allowed. Until recently, in fact, one county at Smith Mountain Lake required landowners to remove shoreline and in-water trees during dock construction and shoreline stabilization. Appalachian Power Company and DGIF worked with the county to change this practice by highlighting the importance of natural shorelines and the contributions of trees and habitat to the lake. Now, new shoreline development and stabilization projects often bundle the trees and woody materials removed from the shoreline and sink them in these construction areas.

A similar project at Lake Moomaw was reported by Verona biologist Paul Bugas. In 2007, working with the U.S. Forest Service and the Highlands Bass Club, tree stumps were stockpiled and then used to create shoreline habitat for largemouth and smallmouth bass. The stumps were secured using steel cable and duckbill anchors to hold them in place. Bugas also mentioned a project back in the early 1990s, creating log cribs as overhead cover. These cribs were later "brushed up" with hardwood brush cuttings to make them more attractive for bass and other fish.

John Copeland

A Claytor Lake State Park volunteer cements pieces of polyethylene pipe into concrete blocks to construct spider block fish habitat.



Tom Hampton

DGIF fisheries technician Cliff Kirk cables a hinge tree to its stump, keeping it close to the shoreline.

Southwest Virginia

At South Holston Lake and Flannagan Reservoir, biologist Tom Hampton's efforts resulted in multiple, long-lasting fish habitats. Hampton pointed out that successes at these lakes resulted from work by fisheries technician Cliff Kirk and fisheries biologist George Palmer, noting that fish habitat work is all about what "we" accomplished.

One example is the partnership Hampton created with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the Washington Bass Club, and local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. For more than ten years, this team installed at least 500 recycled Christmas trees in the barren drawdown areas of South Holston Lake, culminating in the installation of 1,500 trees by Venture Crew 71 of Abingdon in January, 2011. Hampton also coordinated fish habitat site development at Flannagan Reservoir in cooperation with the Dickenson County Bass Clubs and the Corps using a combination of hinge trees—where shoreline trees are felled, then cabled back to the stump—and hardwood brush piles. Hampton and his crew thought like beavers and worked just as hard, creating habitat that will benefit many people.

Claytor Lake, where I work, has seen a number of fish habitat improvements. In 2001, in cooperation with Claytor Lake State Park and local angler Jim Fields, we created three deepwater fish reef sites in 10 to 14 feet

John Odenkirk

DGIF fisheries biologist Scott Herrmann and a volunteer deploy a double-stack Berkely Fish-Hab® at a reef site at Lake Anna with guidance from fisheries biologist Steve Owens.

of water. Since that time, some 200 spider blocks and many Christmas trees have been added to these sites, resulting in places where anglers can fill their live-wells with the bass, bluegill, and crappie drawn there.

Past Claytor Lake work involved a partnership with the Virginia Bass Federation Nation, Claytor Lake State Park, and a group of young women participating in the Virginia State Park's Youth Conservation Corps. In recent years, collaboration between Appalachian Power Company, Friends of Claytor Lake, Claytor Lake State Park, and our Department has produced fish habitat at multiple sites using shoreline tree felling and cabling.

More Bites per Cast!

Department biologists create fish habitat in lakes all over the commonwealth to produce 'more bites per cast'—a phrase coined by former DGIF Fisheries Chief Jack Hoffman. The habitat work is made possible by Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act funding. Mentioned in recent issues of *Virginia Wildlife*, the Act funnels excise tax dollars on the sale of fishing tackle and equipment and motorboat fuels to our Department for these conservation initiatives. Fish habitat initiatives give us the opportunity to work with multiple partners on projects that benefit you.

So the next time you launch at a public fishing lake, look for clues like buoys and signs indicating such work has been completed. When you find the habitat, the fish will be there. The rest is up to you!

John Copeland is a Department fisheries biologist doing fisheries management projects on Claytor Lake, the New River, and other waters in the New River Valley.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Department of Game and Inland Fisheries:
www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/waterbodies/?type=1

John Copeland

Cliff Kirk works with DCR Youth Conservation Corps members installing spider block fish habitats in Claytor Lake.

Virginia's Own: Jim

The legendary turkey hunter and call maker shares a bit of turkey wisdom.

©Bruce Ingram

by Bruce Ingram

In 1986 when I was an up-and-coming outdoor writer and a rookie turkey hunter, friends suggested that I call Winchester's Jim Clay to ask if he would take me on my maiden turkey hunt. Clay, along with his business partner at the time, Tom Duvall, had established one of the first companies devoted specifically to the sport—Perfection Turkey Calls—and had become nationally known for his calling and hunting skills.

In true rookie form, the fall outing consisted of such low points as my showing up without camouflaged gloves or facemask, whispering to Jim that the sounds of a distant dog barking were those of a turkey, and the ultimate humiliation: my shooting at and missing (!) three jakes. Clay bore all of my snafus with a dose of paternal patience, and ever since, Jim has been one of my turkey hunting mentors.

It's easy to understand why the now-65-year-old sportsman has attained such high stature in the turkey hunting realm, for besides his hunting and calling prowess, he was one of the first Virginians to pursue turkeys in the spring.

"When spring gobbler hunting began in Virginia and West Virginia in the early to mid-1960s, it was very controversial," recalls the Winchester sportsman. "Many old timers who thought the fall season was the only respectable time to hunt turkeys claimed that we would wipe out the state's flock by going after them in the spring, that the gobblers would be too easy to kill.

"Others claimed that all the hunters in the woods would totally disrupt the turkeys' reproduction and few of the hens would be bred. But one of the biggest challenges we faced was there simply wasn't much information about how to hunt birds in the spring. And the guys who did know something about spring gobblers refused to share their information."

Building His Knowledge Base

Thus, Clay sought out books by southern sage Archibald Rutledge, who had penned a number of tomes about hunting spring gobblers in the Deep South—where seasons had been established earlier—as well as articles by Dave Harbour who was popularizing the pastime in national outdoor magazines.

Along with a lack of information was a lack of turkeys. The Department was in the beginning stages of its trap and transfer program (led by biologist Kit Shaffer) with what is today the Gathright Wildlife Management Area in Bath County being the focal point of much of its efforts. Given the mountainous domain's reputation as a turkey sanctuary, Jim would drive hours to reach Gathright and then spend the night in his car in order to hunt early the next morning.

Yet another challenge was finding camo and calls, especially quality diaphragms.

"There was no camouflage except the kind manufactured for the military," continues Clay. "I had been hunting turkeys in the fall since I was a kid, so I showed up for my first spring hunt wearing what I usually wore: a brown bird hunter's coat and a pair of gray work pants.

"I could only find a few types of mouth calls at the local sporting goods store, and I would take them out of their boxes, pop them in my mouth, and try them out right there in the store. One diaphragm had a lead frame and even then I was afraid to put something like that in my mouth. Another had an aluminum frame with what looked like part of a balloon stretched across it. Every time I used that call, it tore up the top of my mouth."

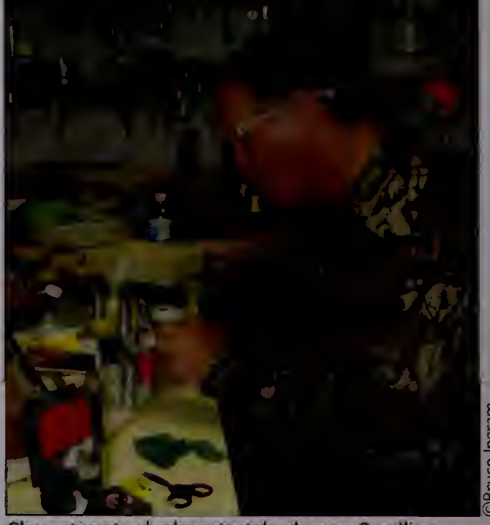
Sensing a void in the call industry, Clay and Duvall would use their spare time during lunch at Winchester's James Wood High

Clay

©Bruce Ingram

©Bruce Ingram

Jim Clay is one of the nation's best known makers of box calls. He works from his home in Winchester.


©Bruce Ingram

Clay estimates he has stretched some 8 million diaphragms.

School to stretch reeds for their calls, later selling them to local hunters and stores. Word spread and Dave Harbour wrote a few magazine articles about their diaphragms. In 1978, the duo decided to relinquish their teaching positions and work full-time at their company, Perfection Turkey Calls.

"I remember the superintendent telling Tommy and me we were making a huge mistake," laughs Jim. "But the first day after we quit, we received an order for twelve thousand dollars, which was about what we were making a year as teachers."

Perfection is credited with creating the first multiple reed diaphragms, and even today mouth calls remain a staple of the company's business, even though high-quality box, slate, glass, and other calls became part of the company's lineup. Diaphragms such as the Raspy D, Super Double D, and the 3-D-Omega (hands-down the best diaphragm I have ever used) are well known in the turkey hunting community.

Indeed, Clay estimates that he has "stretched" some eight million diaphragms and to this day will not share precisely how he does so, stating that he has seen only one other person create mouth calls exactly as he does.

Turkey Hunting Wisdom

Given Jim Clay's vast amount of experience in the autumn and spring woods, I asked him to share with me his best turkey hunting wisdom.

"If someone could figure out how to manufacture patience and give turkey hunters a dose of it, most people would become better turkey hunters," he maintains. "So much of both spring and fall hunting is sitting, watching, and listening for long periods of time. Hunters often worry that the reason a turkey isn't coming in to their position is because they are making some sort of mistake either with their calling or setting up."

Chances are, though, that the reason folks aren't witnessing birds venture toward their positions is because the creatures are on "turkey time." That is, the birds are feeding, watching for danger, and "just being turkeys." A second skill involves being in tune with the outdoor world.

"In the woods, almost every sound means something," Jim explains. "For example, if a squirrel suddenly starts barking, it could mean that a turkey has just shown up. If a bunch of crows start cawing, it could mean that they are harassing a gobbler. Learn what the various animals' normal and alarm sounds are, and you are well on your way to becoming a better turkey hunter."

Woodsmanship is another skill that hunters should master. Clay points out that many of Virginia's old timey fall turkey hunters were consummate woodsmen, knowing how to age turkey droppings and scratchings, able to identify all the foods that turkeys consumed, and adept at venturing deep into the state's forests and returning without aid of a compass or GPS unit. Possessing such skills will make people better spring hunters as well.

Finally, Clay emphasizes that calling skills are a major component of success.

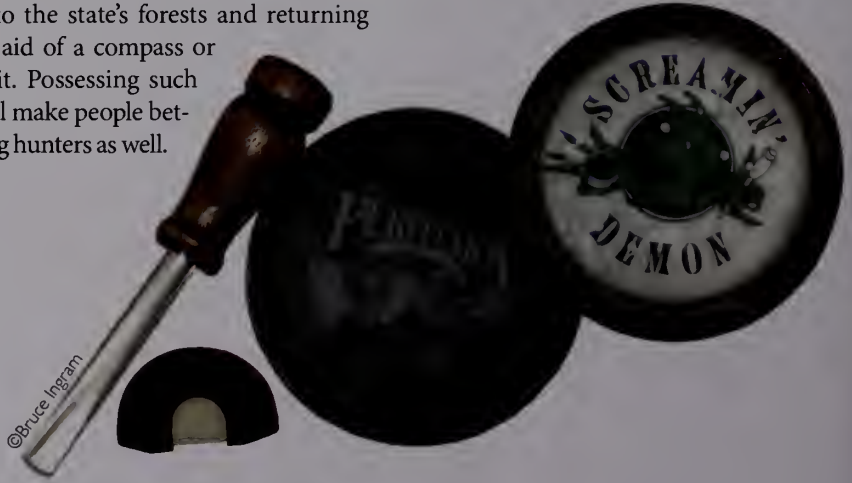
"Some spring and fall days, you don't have to be a great caller to kill a bird," Jim explains. "But the individual who knows how to make extremely realistic sounds when the birds are balky is the person who will kill turkeys that other people can't."

Over a quarter-century has passed since Jim Clay took me hunting on my first outing. Today, I give seminars on how to turkey hunt and write numerous turkey hunting stories every year. And I owe much of my good fortune to him and to other folks who have mentored me through the years.

Bruce Ingram has authored many guide books. For more information on Bruce Ingram's river fishing books: www.bruceingramoutdoors.com.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

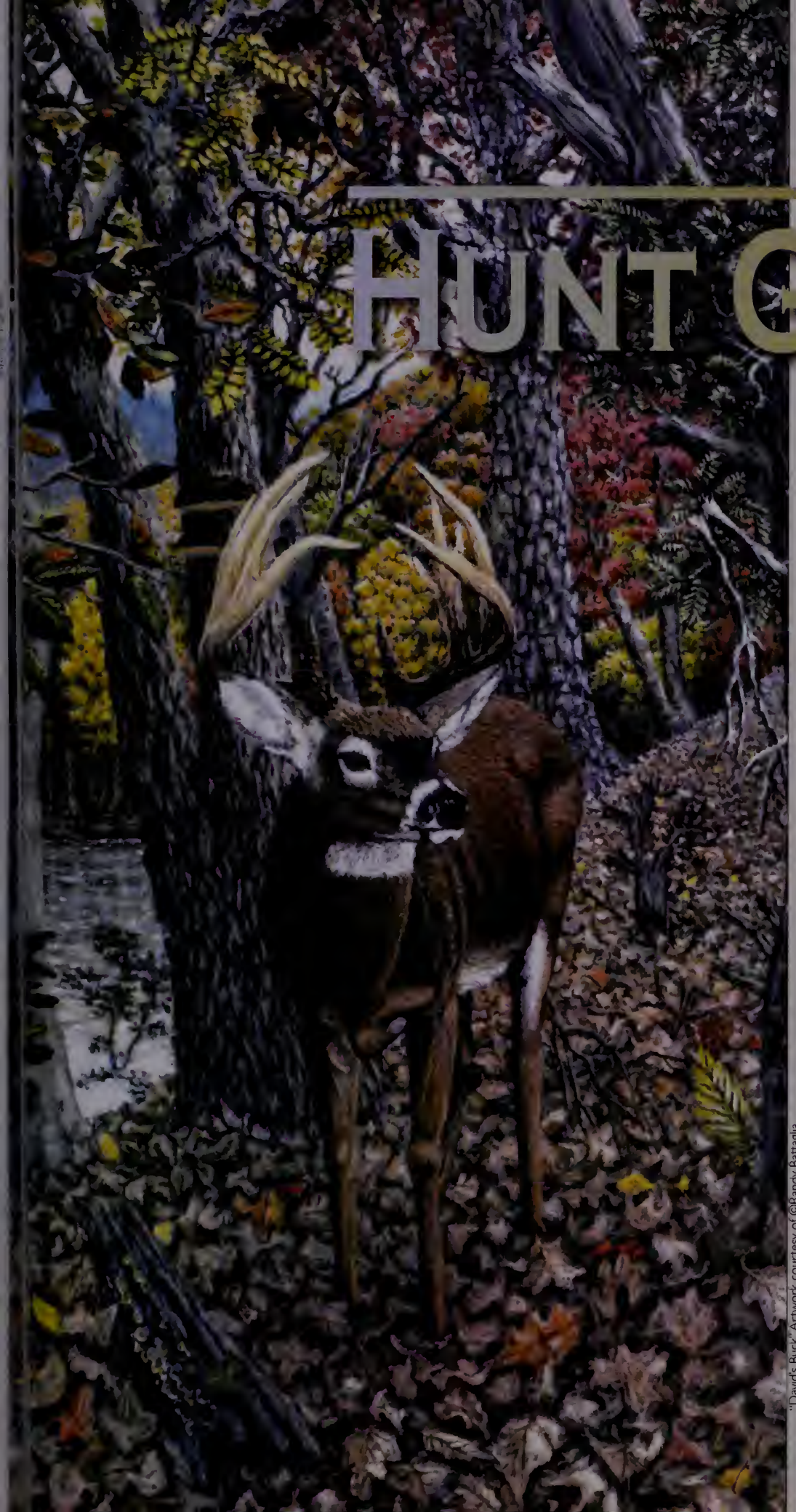
- Perfection Turkey Calls: www.perfectionturkeycalls.com
- Ingram book information and weekly outdoors blog: www.bruceingramoutdoors.com



©Bruce Ingram

2012-2013

HUNT GUIDE



"David's Buck" Artwork courtesy of ©Randy Battaglia

Introduction

It has been several years since the Department has published a comprehensive report, or forecast, in anticipation of the approaching hunting seasons. This year, we asked several of our field biologists who oversee a targeted wildlife program to report in and tell us, in their words, what they are seeing in their travels across the state.

In each case, they have provided historical context for their findings and, when comfortable doing so, offered up a general forecast for the coming season based upon their observations and recent harvest trends.

The artwork here, "David's Buck," was painted in memory of the founder of Hunters for the Hungry, David Horne, and created to honor his legacy of helping others. The print is a limited edition of just 750. Each one is signed and numbered by the artist, Randy Battaglia. All proceeds go to feed the hungry in Virginia. For ordering information and a view of the full image, visit www.h4hungry.org. Learn more about Hunters for the Hungry on page 44.

©Ralph Hensley

Dwight Dyke

A Look Back at Deer Activity

During the past deer season 233,104 deer were reported harvested by hunters in Virginia. This total included 98,874 antlered bucks, 21,008 button bucks, and 113,106 does (or, 48.5%) and 116 unknown deer. The 2011 deer kill total was higher (up 5%) than the 222,074 deer reported taken in 2010. It is in line with the last 10-year average of 230,850.

Deer kill levels were down slightly in Tidewater (down 2%) but were up in all other regions, including the Southern Piedmont (up 7%), Northern Piedmont (up 8%), Southern Mountains (up 13%), and Northern Mountains (up 3%).

Archers, not including crossbow hunters, took 17,338 deer. The bow kill comprised 7 percent of the total, while crossbows resulted in a kill of 11,001 deer, or 5 percent of the total kill. Muzzleloader hunters harvested 55,420 deer, or 24 percent of the total kill. Over 167,500 deer (72%) were checked using the Department's telephone and Internet checking systems. The youth deer hunting day on the last Saturday in September resulted in a reported deer kill of 1,864 animals.

Because the Department changes deer regulations every other year and just did so during the fall of 2011, there are no major changes for the fall 2012 season other than the fact that several new areas have been added to the special urban archery season(s). See the hunting digest for details.

Tidewater

The Tidewater deer kill was down just slightly (2%) from 2010. This is good news for a region where the Department has been trying to stabilize or reduce deer herds for the past decade. Over that 10-year period, deer herds over much of the region have exhibited significant population increases. To address these increasing populations, the Department has now put into effect full season either-sex deer seasons in all but three Tidewater counties.

Piedmont

The Piedmont represents a very mixed bag of deer management issues and results. After a decade of effort, deer herds in a couple of far northern Piedmont counties are finally showing signs of reduction (e.g., Fauquier and Loudoun). Counties in the Southern Piedmont have recovered from a decline from about 10 years ago. Deer populations in most counties throughout the Piedmont have remained fairly stable over that time.

Mountain

The biggest challenge in deer management in Virginia over the past decade has been the decline in deer hunting and resulting deer kill on public lands in the mountains. Since the mid-1990s, the deer harvest on public lands west of the Blue Ridge has declined by approximately 60 percent.

Our staff believe there are a number of factors involved in this decline, including but not limited to: deteriorating habitat quality for deer on national forest lands, significantly declining hunter numbers and pressure on public lands, predators, and liberal either-sex deer hunting day regulations that have been enacted on adjacent private lands over the past decade. An additional issue identified by concerned public land deer hunters is a potential over-harvest of antlerless deer on these public properties.

The potential over-harvest of antlerless deer on public lands is an issue that has already been

2011 Private Land Relative Deer Population Abundance by Management Unit
Index is based on a 3-year average of antlered bucks killed per square mile of estimated deer habitat.

addressed by significant reductions in the number of public land either-sex deer hunting days. The objective of these reductions was to cut the female deer kill level on such lands by 50 percent or more, and these changes have been successful. It remains to be seen, however, if these changes will also be successful in bringing back the public land deer herd(s).

Summary

The best way to compare deer populations and hunting potential among different areas is through the deer kill per square mile of habitat. The map on page 32 shows the relative differences among counties in the kill per square mile of deer (antlered bucks) on private land based on an average of the past three hunting seasons. Kill per square mile of habitat is a good index of the relative densities of deer on private lands among counties in Virginia.

The Department's deer management efforts over the past several years to increase the female deer kill over much of the state, especially on private lands, has been very successful. Female deer harvest numbers have reached record levels for the past six consecutive deer seasons. These high and sustained female deer kill levels were intended to eventually lead to a decrease in the statewide deer herd and a decline in total deer kill numbers.

It should be noted, however, that the Department is currently actively managing to increase deer populations in the Cumberland Plateau counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise, in the Allegheny Highland counties of Alleghany, Bath, and Highland, and on national forest lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, where hunting pressure has resulted in population declines over the past ten years.

This deer report was contributed by Deer Project Leader Matt Knox, who works out of the Forest office. You may reach Matt at Matt.Knox@dgif.virginia.gov.

©John R. Ford

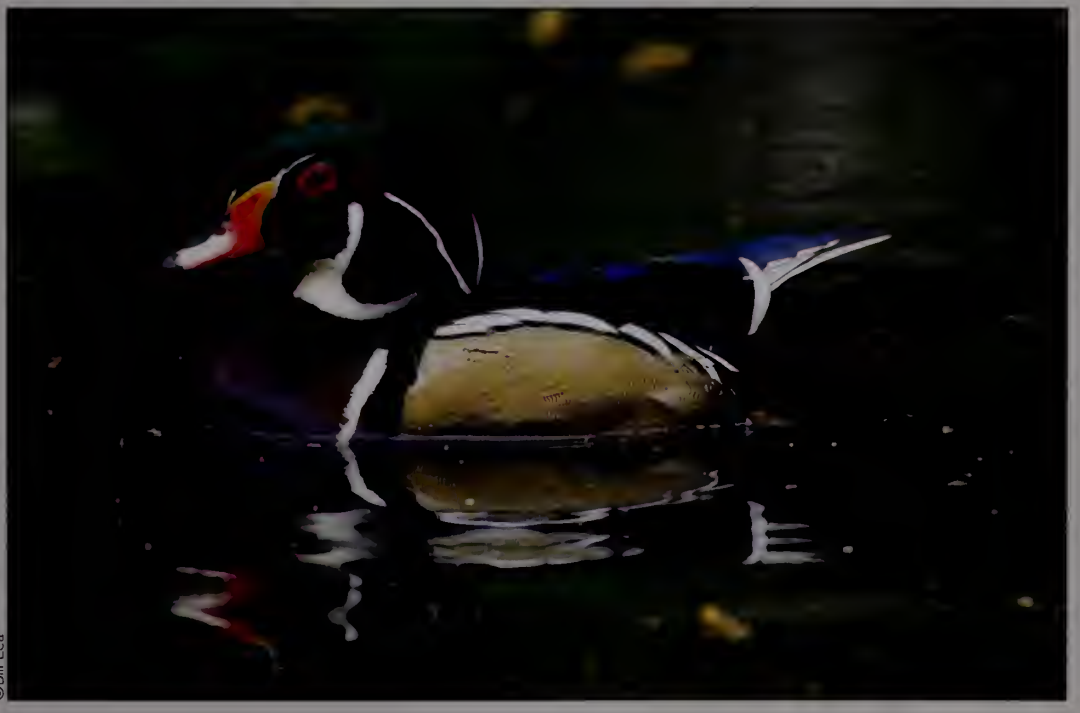
Mild weather during the 2011–2012 season left many waterfowl hunters frustrated and disappointed. While we cannot predict the weather for the upcoming season, reports from the breeding grounds provide an indication of waterfowl populations this coming year. The forecasts below are based upon preliminary reports of surveys conducted throughout the primary breeding areas of waterfowl that winter in the mid-Atlantic.

Duck Production Forecast

Early habitat conditions in the prairie pothole region this year were reported as being poor to fair. Snow and rainfall amounts were down throughout the region and many grassland nesting areas were lost to cropland conversion. Luckily, much of the region benefitted from spring rainfalls, which created temporary wetlands important for waterfowl broods. In the heart of the prairie, that rain improved conditions to good overall. In the Northeast, conditions appear to be good to occasionally excellent throughout Atlantic Canada, Ontario, and Quebec, despite delayed spring thaws. The majority of waterfowl wintering in Virginia, especially black ducks and mallards, breed in this eastern region. In both regions, breeding waterfowl numbers appear to be higher, likely benefitting from above average 2011 production and a mild winter last year, which allowed birds to return to their breeding grounds in favorable physical condition.

Local Breeding Waterfowl

Although Virginia may be more notable as an important wintering area, waterfowl (primarily wood ducks, mallards, black ducks, and Canada geese) also utilize the state as a breeding zone. Each year a survey is conducted to provide breeding pair and population estimates of breeding waterfowl. These estimates are used to monitor trends in local populations and to set waterfowl hunting regulations both in Virginia and throughout the Atlantic Flyway. The survey consists of aerial or ground monitoring of 165 individual one-square-kilometer plots, which were randomly selected in the different physiographic zones of the state. The plots are surveyed by Department staff and other cooperators during the months of April and May. All waterfowl on these plots are identified and counted, and their breeding status (paired, single, flocked) is recorded. The data are combined with data from other Atlantic coast states to estimate breeding waterfowl populations in the Atlantic Flyway.



©Bill Lea

Habitat conditions in Virginia during the spring of 2012 were fair to good. Dry wetland conditions during the early season were alleviated by significant precipitation during the middle and latter portions of the nesting period. Duck and goose nest initiation was one to two weeks earlier than average, which increased opportunities for re-nesting attempts if the first attempt was unsuccessful. Preliminary breeding pair estimates for black ducks and Canada geese are slightly below average, while pair estimates for mallards are significantly higher than average.

Over the past four years the breeding wood duck population in Virginia has become a management concern for DGIF staff. Pairs of breeding wood duck dropped from an estimated 20,000 in 2007 to 15,000 in 2008. In 2009 estimates again declined, to 10,000 breeding pairs. The population remained around 10,000 in 2010 and 2011. Preliminary estimates for this breeding season will likely number around 13,000 pairs, an increase from years past but still well below the long-term average of 23,000 breeding pairs. DGIF biologists are increasing monitoring efforts to better understand the factors that may be contributing to this decline.

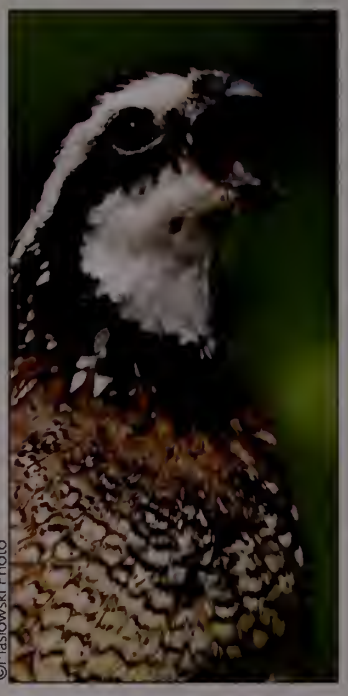
Due to above average production in 2011 and last year's mild winter, waterfowl production in the breeding areas should be average to above average. Local waterfowl production is also expected to be average or above average. All finalized numbers, from both local and primary production area surveys, can be found in the "Status of Waterfowl Fact Sheet" updated annually on the DGIF website at www.huntfishva.com.

Whether hunting conditions improve over the 2011–2012 season is something that only time will tell. One thing Virginia waterfowlers can count on is an opportunity for a quality hunt by applying for any of the seven DGIF waterfowl hunts offered through the Virginia Quota Hunts Program. These managed hunts provide unique opportunities to pursue waterfowl and other species on public lands that may otherwise be closed to hunting. In addition to the quota hunts lottery, wildlife management areas such as the Chickahominy, Game Farm Marsh, Mattaponi, Mockhorn Island, and Saxis all offer quality waterfowl hunting experiences.

This waterfowl report was contributed by Waterfowl Biologist Ben Lewis, who is stationed in the eastern regional office. You may reach Ben at Ben.Lewis@dgif.virginia.gov.

©Dwight Dyke

The 21st Century "Bird Hunter"



©Maslowski Photo

"Bird hunter?" you say, "What the heck does that mean?" It means an upland game bird hunter of quail, grouse, pheasant, and woodcock, primarily. They have become so rare that very few know what is meant by the term "bird hunter" anymore. But there was a time when most folks would have understood this moniker.

Only 40 short years ago hunters were more numerous both in Virginia and nationally. In 1973, there were 143,000 quail hunters in the state; today, they number barely 8,000.

Why the dramatic drop? Much of it can be attributed to declines in the populations of favored game birds. Bobwhite quail have declined markedly across most of the commonwealth, in places by more than 80 percent.

Notes on the Quail Recovery Initiative Underway

- Six quail focus areas have been identified (incorporating 15 counties) across the state.
- Five private lands wildlife biologists were hired 2.5 years ago.
- Biologists have made over 1,150 site visits to 892 different landowners, and in so doing, written 650 habitat management plans.
- Biologists have participated in, planned, or hosted 82 public events.
- 10,457 acres of habitat have been created or maintained. These acres include: 547 acres of field borders, 448 acres of idle crop lands, 201 acres of idle tobacco lands, 425 acres of conservation cover, 442 acres of tree and shrub establishment, 43 acres of brush management, and 3,099 acres of prescribed burning.
- Habitat demonstration areas are being developed on Amelia and Powhatan Wildlife Management Areas and at the New Kent Forestry Center.
- Habitat management DVDs have been widely distributed.
- New monitoring programs have been established in the targeted counties.
- A new promotional DVD was developed, "Answering the Call: Virginia's Quail Recovery Initiative, which is available upon request by sending an email to Marc Puckett (email address, pg. 35) with your name and address.
- The Virginia Quail Council, developed to facilitate partnerships, currently includes 22 participating conservation organizations.

©Maslowski Photo

But the number of quail hunters has declined even more than the species itself—which means there are fewer bird hunters left to pass the tradition on to younger hunters. Perhaps more than any other form of hunting, newcomers to upland bird hunting need a mentor, an "old hand," to guide them through associated challenges like bird dog training, or being able to see and understand "birdy" cover, or finding places to hunt.

In addition to falling populations of game birds, land-use patterns have changed: posted land is more common, and competition among hunters for the remaining lands has intensified. Unlike other forms of hunting, upland bird hunting requires larger acreages to allow fast-hunting pointing dogs enough room to run and to provide enough cover for the birds. While only a few acres are adequate for deer or squirrel hunting, several hundred acres is often considered a minimum for upland bird hunting.

So, is upland bird hunting dead? I would argue that with a change in mindset and tactics, it is still possible to enjoy upland bird hunting in 21st-century Virginia.

One of the first things a newcomer to bird hunting must realize is having a heavy game bag is not the primary indicator of success. The "good old days" of finding 12 coveys of quail in a day may be over in most of our state, but there are still places where 4 to 6 coveys can be found in a day (and we hope to increase those numbers through our Quail Recovery Initiative). The key to finding hunting coverts is to learn to identify quail cover, to regularly scout, to look for larger tracts of cut-over lands—mainly in "pine country" and as close to farm lands as possible, to get to know the landowners and offer suggestions (and on-the-ground help) for managing those cut-overs, and to consider joining hunt clubs to gain access. Yes, it takes work, but those willing to do this can put together a fine "portfolio" of hunting coverts.

The second recommendation is to think outside the proverbial "box." It will be hard to make it as a bird hunter, pursuing only a single favorite species or even two. The woodcock season length was recently increased in Virginia from 30 to 45 days. That's two additional weeks of opportunity. Quite often, woodcock and quail can be found in close proximity. They both favor some form of early-successional cover, with woodcock preferring wetter areas. I recall with great clarity several quail hunts where 1 or 2 coveys of quail were supplemented by 8 to 10 woodcock finds—turning an otherwise slow day into one filled with action.

Beyond that proverbial box, maybe thinking outside the octagon is required. Don't exclude mourning dove as a quarry worthy of upland style hunting. While the traditional method of dove hunting is actually called a "shoot" and centers around doves flying into planted fields, they can also be hunted with dogs. I spent much time in my impatient youth "walking up" doves when the fly-in shooting was slow. Upon numerous occasions when the seasons overlapped, I took dove while hunting other upland game birds.

Further, many variations exist today on releasing pen-raised quail. While studies have shown releasing pen-raised quail will not restore wild quail populations, newer pre-season release methods using high-quality pen-raised quail can provide fun hunting throughout the season. Typical methods include first creating excellent quail cover, then employing pre-season release systems in late-September through October to establish "coveys" for the hunting season. This may not be for everyone, but information on how to do it is available on request.

And let's not forget our shooting preserves. Many offer excellent packages for a variety of upland game birds. By combining the above strategies, with some shooting preserve hunts and the occasional trip "out west" to hunt the best remaining expanses of America's wild bird cover, one can become a satisfied 21st-century bird hunter.

This uplond bird report wos contributed by Smoll Game Project Leader Marc Puckett, who works out of the Formville office. You may reach Morc ot Marc.Puckett@dgif.virginia.gov.

©Bill Lea

Historical Harvest

The hunting and trapping of furbearing animals played an important role in the exploration and settlement of colonial Virginia. As early as 1546, a French sailing ship traded with Native Americans in the Chesapeake Bay region for fur pelts. The wilderness of Virginia was rich in wildlife resources and fur was one the most valuable commodities available for export. Great demand for beaver pelts and other furs by Europeans fueled a burgeoning industry with a seemingly endless supply of animals to trap. Between 1699 and 1715, almost a quarter-million pelts from 13 species were exported from Virginia to England.

Eventually, however, intense commercial demand coupled with unregulated and unsustainable harvest, gradually reduced the population of some furbearer species to the brink of extinction. Protection, enhancement, and reestablishment of Virginia's furbearer populations did not occur until almost 200 years later when this Department was formed and modern wildlife management practices were instituted. Today, populations of most furbearer species are flourishing and trapping remains a viable and enjoyable outdoor pursuit.

Current Pelt Harvest

The number of pelts purchased or brokered by permitted fur dealers serves as a useful index of furbearer harvest effort. In Virginia, the number of pelts purchased or brokered by 34 fur dealers increased from 16,369 in 2009–2010 to 32,834 in 2010–2011 (+100.6%). Fur dealer pelt transactions increased for all furbearers (Table, pg. 37), particularly the terrestrial species (bobcat, coyote, opossum, raccoon, and skunk) that had trapping success negatively impacted the previous season by heavy snows and cold temperatures. Increases in harvest for aquatic furbearer species were significant, but not as large as those for terrestrial species. Demand for otter pelts increased during 2010–2011 and pelt sales increased 129.7 percent compared to the previous season. Bobcat pelt transactions more than doubled in 2010–2011 (+109.6%) and exceeded the 46-year average reported by fur dealers from 1964–2010 by 137.3 percent.

Fur pelts purchased or brokered by Virginia fur dealers were valued at approximately $324,843 during the 2010–2011 fur harvest season. The total value of fur purchased during 2010–2011 was 95.2 percent greater (2010 dollar equivalent) than the previous reporting year ($166,424), but represents only 2.6 percent of the record value ($12,564,118) of fur pelts reported purchased during the 1980–1981 fur harvest season (2010 dollar equivalent). Although the total value of the fur harvest nearly doubled last season, the overall average pelt price was very similar to the previous year. The average price paid per fur pelt was $9.89 during the 2010–2011 season, a decrease of 2.8 percent compared to the average price paid ($10.17) during the 2009–2010 season (Table 1). Average pelt prices increased for bobcat (+23.4%), gray fox (+22.1%), red fox (+12.0%), mink (+21.4%), opossum (+11.5%), otter (+30.5%), and skunk (+21.9%). Average pelt prices decreased for beaver (-29.3%), coyote (-16.6%), and muskrat (-5.1%). The average pelt price paid for raccoon was unchanged (0.7%).

Trapping license sales are usually correlated with fur pelt prices. Total statewide trapping license sales increased 14.3 percent from 1,227 during the 2009–2010 trapping season to 1,403 during the 2010–2011 season. Total trapping license sales for the 2010–2011 season were 73 percent less than the record high of 5,293 trapping licenses sold during the 1979–1980 trapping season and 98 percent greater than the record low of 709 licenses sold during the 1993–1994 trapping season.

©Bill Lea

2010-2011 Virginia Fur Dealer Transactions and Average Pelt Value

Species	# Pelts Sold or Brokered	Average Pelt Price
Beaver	3,523	$ 11.29
Bobcat	631	42.48
Coyote	913	9.52
Fox, Gray	2,274	16.92
Fox, Red	2,839	12.49
Mink	473	11.55
Muskrat	8,078	5.97
Opossum	1,284	1.27
Otter	978	44.93
Raccoon	11,698	6.49
Skunk	137	3.26

Bobcat Harvest

A total of 1,669 bobcats were harvested during the 2010–2011 season, representing an increase of 31.4 percent from the previous year. Of this total, 658 bobcats (39.4%) were trapped and 1,011 (60.6%) were killed by hunters. The overall increase in bobcat harvest was most affected by the number of bobcats trapped (up 103.1 percent from the previous season). Heavy snows and cold temperatures hampered trapping success in 2009–2010. Trapping conditions were much improved in 2010–2011 and trappers caught more than twice as many bobcats as they did the season prior.

Hunter harvest of bobcats was up slightly from the previous season (+6.9%). Since most hunter-killed bobcats were harvested opportunistically while hunting other animals, a variety of different weapons were used. Most hunter-killed bobcats were harvested using a rifle (49.9%), followed by a muzzleloader (20.4%), or shotgun (18.8%). Other weapons included a bow (7.5%), crossbow (2.8%), or pistol (0.6%). The overall sex ratio for harvested bobcats was 1.25 females per male and appeared to differ by harvest method. Hunters seemed to harvest a higher proportion of female bobcats than did trappers. Most likely, many hunters misidentified the sex of young male bobcats that lacked obvious male genitalia and reported them as females.

Regionally, more bobcats were taken from the South Mountain (595) and South Piedmont (539) counties than from other portions of the state. Fewer bobcats were taken from the North Mountain (211), North Piedmont (145), and Tidewater (179) areas. Bobcat harvest increased in all regions of the state, except for the North Piedmont where harvest was stable (+1.4%). Harvest density (per 100 square miles of forested habitat) was highest in the South Mountain, South Piedmont, and North Mountain regions. It was lowest in the Tidewater and North Piedmont areas.

River Otter Harvest

Trappers harvested 826 river otters during the 2010–2011 trapping season. This total was 37.9 percent higher than the 2009–2010 harvest of 599 otters but 17.6 percent lower than the previous 10-year average harvest of 1,003 river otter pelts. Prior to the 2010–2011 season, otter harvest declined each of the previous four years, following plummeting prices of $112 in 2004–2005 to $36 in 2005–2006. Average pelt prices for otter increased in 2010–2011 and late fur auction prices approached those realized in 2006. Higher pelt prices resulted in renewed interest among trappers who were not targeting otters when fur prices were down. Harvest in the Tidewater region increased by 21.5 percent and accounted for 395 (47.8%) of the total river otters trapped. Harvest increased in all other regions except the North Mountain counties, where it remained stable (0% change). Otter harvest density (number tagged per 100 miles of river habitat) was highest in the Tidewater region and lowest in the North Mountain area.

Coyote Study Underway

Beginning in 2011, a three-year research project was initiated to obtain information on the ecology of the Eastern coyote in Virginia. Study areas are focused on public lands (national forest) in the western mountains where deer populations have reportedly declined. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- Estimate population demographic parameters such as abundance, density, recruitment, and mortality rates;
- Assess coyote diet over seasons and compare diets of coyote and black bears, especially with respect to prevalence of white-tailed deer; and

©Bill Lea

- Determine home range sizes, assess habitat selection, and examine movement behavior in relation to landscape features and season.

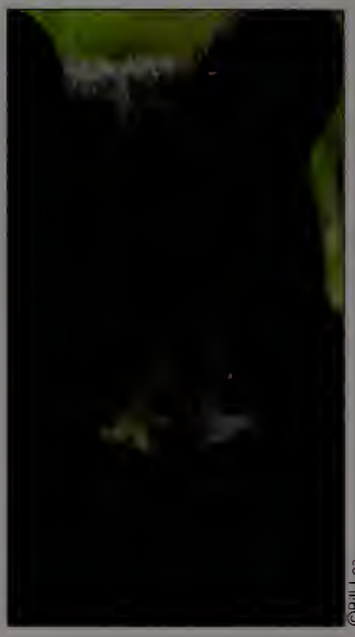
This project is being contracted with Virginia Tech; two graduate students are conducting the field research. Cooperators include the US Forest Service, USDA Wildlife Services, and The Nature Conservancy.

As of mid-May 2012, twelve coyotes (6 males, 6 females) were captured and fitted with satellite radio collars. Of the 6 coyotes captured during 2011, 3 were shot and 2 were killed by trappers (caught in snares). Since the spring of 2011, hundreds of coyote and bear scat samples have been collected, including collections during the peak fawning season in May and June. Scat samples are being collected monthly throughout the entire year.

Preliminary DNA results suggest that field identification of scats is problematic and misidentification is common. Only scat confirmed by DNA analyses to be coyote and bear will be used in the study (possibly bobcat, also). Deer density in both study areas is being estimated seasonally by conducting road surveys with infrared detectors and spotlights. Trail cameras are being used to determine the presence of mid-sized coyote prey species on the study areas. Small mammal trapping grid locations have been identified for determining abundance and density of small mammal prey species. Habitat measurements also will be collected at camera locations and trap grid sites. Field work for the study is scheduled for completion in 2013, with final results available in 2014.

This furbearer report was contributed by Furbearer Project Leader Mike Fies, who is stationed in the Verona regional office. You may reach Mike at Mike.Fies@dgif.virginia.gov.

©Bill Lea



©Bill Lea

Black bears capture human admiration and interest like few other wildlife species. As a reflection of strength, images of bears are often used as icons for countries and athletic teams. Because of their intelligence and ingenuity, bears are perceived to have human-like emotional qualities. Black bears are recognized as indicators of ecological health and symbols of the American wilderness. Many citizens simply value bears because they exist in their native ecosystem and they take pleasure in watching, hunting, or photographing this fascinating mammal.

The Hunting Tradition

As early as 1910, regulated hunting and trapping have been used to manage wildlife populations and foster the wise use of wildlife resources for food, fur, and other utilitarian purposes. Specific population levels can be achieved by adjusting the length and timing of the hunting season, as well as the legal methods of take to manipulate the number of animals and sex and age composition of the harvest. Specifically, wildlife managers collect information from hunting harvest (hunting effort, success rates, age/sex structure, for example) to determine if they are meeting black bear population objectives (such as stabilizing growth) and in turn modify hunting regulations to meet management goals.

Hunting is the major factor controlling most bear populations. Depending on harvest levels, black bear populations can increase, decrease, or remain the same in the presence of hunting. A recent survey of 23 states with black bear hunting indicated that 57 percent were experiencing increasing populations and the remaining states had stable populations.

Black bear populations may decrease with heavy hunting pressure. Because female bears produce only a few cubs every other year, depleted populations are slow to recover. Thus, black bear hunting seasons should be conservative unless population reduction is the objective. Bear populations will grow when the number of juvenile bears that reach adulthood (called recruitment) exceeds the number of bears that die (hunting and non-hunting mortality) that year. Populations are stabilized when annual deaths equal annual recruitment.

Black bear populations can withstand regulated hunting on an annual basis, and historically, managed hunting has been an effective system for protecting bear numbers because it has enlisted those interested in the continued abundance of the resource.

Adjusting the hunting season structure to coincide with bear damage periods or to enhance hunter effort may provide greater opportunities to remove animals involved in human-bear

conflict from the population. The establishment of a September black bear hunting season in Wisconsin, for example, increased the harvest of black bears that were causing damage and decreased the average number of nuisance black bears destroyed per year using kill permits from 110 to 19. Similarly, a season extension in Pennsylvania to allow concurrent bear and deer hunting seasons resulted in increased harvest rates of bears involved in human-bear conflicts.

The regulated harvest of black bear populations is occasionally a controversial social issue. Perhaps the most contentious issues involve fair chase and the ethics of certain methods of harvest, especially trapping of bears, hunting bears over bait, hunting with dogs, or hunting in the spring. The potential physical effects on black bears from hunting and the expense of regulating various hunting methods also have been questioned by critics. Of additional concern, regulated hunting by certain methods may not be socially acceptable or feasible near urban areas.

Regulated hunting provides economic benefits in the form of hunting-related expenditures (food, lodging, equipment, and transportation) and may have a significant economic impact upon rural communities. However, the economic benefits of regulated black bear hunting are not limited to hunting expenditures. A complete economic evaluation of bear hunting should also include added damage costs (agricultural losses and more vehicle collisions) that would be incurred with a growing bear population in the absence of hunting. Additionally, by purchasing licenses to hunt bears, hunters pay to provide a public service (population control) and generate revenue that supports wildlife conservation and management.

©Bill Lea

Black Bear Management in Virginia

Bears were plentiful and widespread when Jamestown was settled in 1607. By 1900, habitat changes and the over-harvest of bears for food and hides had nearly extirpated the species but for small, isolated populations in remote areas. Bear populations have risen in Virginia and throughout the eastern United States during the past century. Harvest management, reforestation, public land purchases, oak forest maturation, bear restoration efforts, and natural range expansions have all contributed to this trend. Although a growing population has been welcomed by many people, the abundance of bears can also create concerns for others. With the resulting increase in populations, bear management objectives have shifted from restoring to stabilizing populations over much of the commonwealth. Active management is necessary to maintain bear populations at optimum levels.

Since 2001, Virginia's Black Bear Management Plan (BBMP) has provided the blueprint for black bear management to meet the Department's mission of managing "wildlife...to maintain optimum populations...to serve the needs of the Commonwealth." The BBMP reflects the values of a diverse public about what should be accomplished with bear management here. The goals of the BBMP were drafted by Virginia citizens to meet their needs and represent the interests of diverse groups, including landowners, homeowners, hunters (bear and non-bear), wildlife watchers, farmers, environmental organizations, resource management agencies, and animal welfare interests.

Especially for population, recreation, and human-bear conflict management, Virginia's bear hunting seasons specifically address the public values reflected by the BBMP goal directions. A key population direction is to meet the cultural carrying capacity (CCC) for bears—which translates to the maximum number of bears in an area that is acceptable to the human population. The CCC is a function of the human tolerance to bears and the benefits that people derive from bears. Ultimately, CCC involves a combination of social, economic, political, and biological perspectives. Bear hunting seasons are designed to meet specific population objectives to achieve CCC and balance the positive demands of recreation with the negative concerns over bear damage.

Due to its efficacy, cost-effectiveness, tradition, and recreational value, regulated hunting has been and will be the preferred bear population management option. Regulated hunting is highly effective for controlling and managing bear populations (stabilizing or decreasing). While providing recreational and nuisance management benefits, conservative hunting seasons are also compatible with objectives to increase bear populations.

Bear Hunting Trends and Hunter Satisfaction

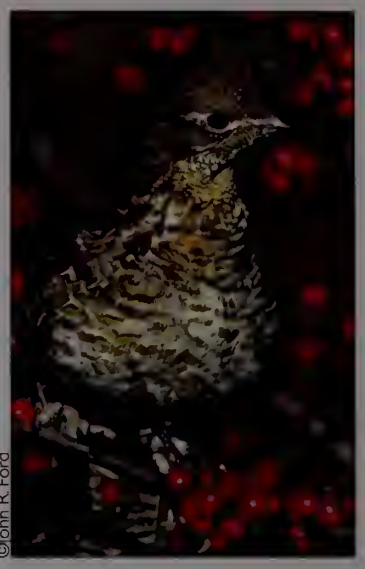
Mirroring the downward trend of all hunting participation in Virginia, the number of bear hunters and hunting effort have declined since the 1970s, although both the number of bear hunters and bear hunter effort have remained relatively stable since the 1990s. The dynamics affecting hunter participation are the result of a complex array of factors involving changes in social values, demographics, economics, leisure time, and other recreational opportunities. The effect that recreational hunting and bear management programs can have on hunter participation is unknown (for example, sociological conditions may have the greatest influence on hunting trends).

Black bears in Virginia have expanded their range well beyond the areas that have been traditionally hunted. This growing bear population provides new opportunities for hunting recreation that are consistent with all population objectives, and bear populations may continue to increase as recreational hunting is carefully implemented. Additional recreational hunting programs in parts of the state with expanding populations will generate more information on population status and may provide some necessary relief to growing nuisance concerns. When population control eventually becomes necessary, established hunting programs will already be in place as a population management option.

Individuals hunt for many reasons which make up a set of distinct pleasures, such as: companionship, seeing bears, being close to nature, testing their skills, the challenge of pursuit, obtaining meat, and working with dogs. Yet, specific information on bear hunter satisfaction is limited, especially in Virginia. Recreational benefits would be enhanced by a better understanding of hunter satisfaction and by tailoring hunting opportunities accordingly. Additionally, a better understanding of constraints (such as access, free time, cost) could help explain changes in hunter effort and would benefit the design of hunting programs that maximize recreational satisfaction, minimize constraints to hunting participation, and achieve participation objectives.

To view the Black Bear Management Plan, go to: www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear.

This black bear report was contributed by Bear Project Leader Jaime Sajecki, who is stationed in the Forest regional office. You may reach Jaime at Jaime.Sajecki@dgif.virginia.gov.

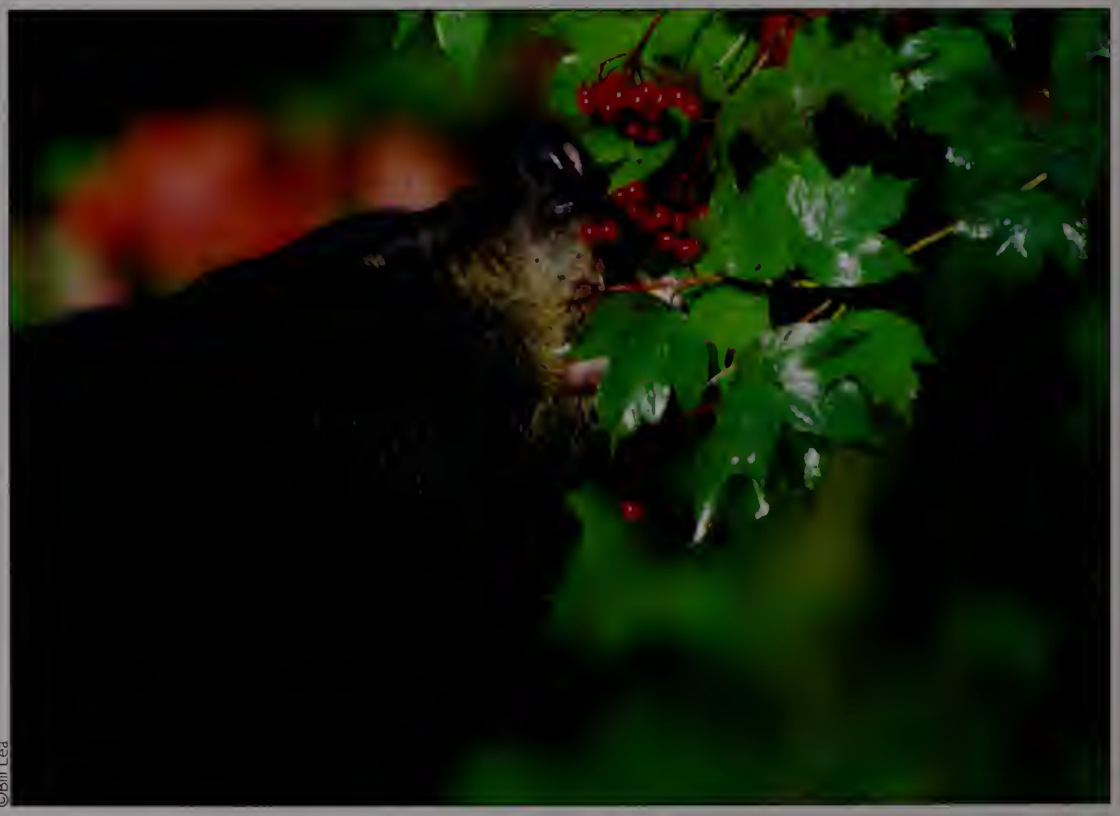


©John R. Ford

Ecology and Management

"Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"—the title of a folk song penned by Pete Seeger and Joe Hickerson in 1960—could easily be modified by today's hunter to ask, "Where Have All the Ruffed Grouse Gone?" Many of us old-timers can remember the good old days when a bad day was about 20 flushes and on good days you moved 30 birds. My best day was near 40. Many hunters today report flushing only a few birds per hunt.

As coordinator for the Department's ruffed grouse hunter survey, I oftentimes get asked the question, "Where have all the ruffed grouse gone?" The Department annually monitors flushing rates from a select group of avid grouse hunters. Currently, hunter satisfaction is low and flushing rates and recent flushing are among the lowest of the survey's history. It's therefore no mystery we're losing grouse hunters. While I still grouse hunt with my older setter, I have come to realize that my satisfaction these days is working with my dog rather than recounting the good times of the past.



©Bill Lea

Many theories about the grouse decline have been offered by hunters, outdoor writers, and biologists. Popular and prominent outdoor writer and author George Bird Evans was a tireless advocate of shorter grouse seasons. He firmly believed late season hunting was the root cause of the decline.

The grouse decline has challenged the very core of wildlife management, the principle that hunters only harvest the "doomed surplus" of hunted populations. This characterization from Dr. Paul Errington, a prominent ecologist from Iowa, has been easy for me to remember and understand.

So are we being good stewards of ruffed grouse and other species needing young forests? Many researchers and managers have addressed this question for grouse inhabiting the core of grouse range, but little is known about the ecology of ruffed grouse populations in the Appalachians. Dr. Roy Kirkpatrick of Virginia Tech has summed it up, "There is no animal studied more, yet still known very little about."

Northern vs. Appalachian Grouse Populations

Unlike their northern counterparts, Appalachian grouse do not follow a predictable 10-year population cycle. The northern cycle is somewhat complex, but Dr. Lloyd Keith of the University of Minnesota believed it involved the population dynamics of ruffed grouse, snowshoe hares, and goshawks. Briefly, snowshoe hare populations can grow rapidly; they can produce as many as 4 litters with 3 to 8 young per year. However, with such potential growth rates, hare populations can grow so quickly they outpace the growth of their food supply and their numbers crash. Goshawks enjoy the overabundance of snowshoes. But snowshoe hares eventually dip and goshawks shift their diets to grouse. With high predation from the abundant goshawk population, grouse populations decline. By then, snowshoe habitat has recovered and the cycle is repeated.

Southern grouse populations have unpredictable good and bad years but do not experience this 10-year cycle. Annual fluctuations may be the result of environmental conditions. Young birds are vulnerable to extended cold and wet weather. The Department conducts annual surveys of drumming males. The bad news is that our drumming rates are very low. On the positive side, the rate we hear grouse drumming has been stable over the past several years.

Concern for the status of ruffed grouse led our Department to sponsor research on factors contributing to regional declines in numbers. I believe many avid grouse hunters and some biologists were second-guessing the concern Mr. Evans raised about late season hunting. Because of the regional concern for grouse and broad implications for grouse season lengths, eight states decided to work together to answer the questions and address our concerns about grouse populations. A cooperative project entitled the "Appalachian Cooperative Grouse Research Project" (ACGRP) was begun in 1996 with the goal of identifying the cause of the decline. The 6-year project resulted in one of the largest wildlife studies ever conducted on ruffed grouse. The collaborative effort involved coordination of 17 graduate students at 8 universities. We captured and radio-collared 3,118 grouse. We tracked these birds to determine the cause of death, home range, reproduction, and a host of other variables. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we closed hunting on 3 areas during the last 3 years of the study to evaluate the impacts of hunting on survival. If hunting was affecting populations, the closure ought to result in a significant improvement in survival and subsequent population densities.

©Bill Lea

Surprisingly, survival rates of Appalachian grouse (42%) were higher than northern populations (25–30%). Avian predation was the leading cause of grouse mortality of Appalachian birds. The timing of grouse mortalities was correlated with the migration of Cooper's and other woodland hawks. Hunters only accounted for 12 percent of the mortalities observed. During our test of hunting effects, we found grouse populations increased in both control and experimental areas in the 3 years where hunting was closed. Because the closed area did not increase more than the control area, we concluded that current hunting levels are not having an effect on populations.

So if Appalachian grouse survival rates are better than the northern populations, why aren't our populations doing better? The answer is more chicks survive in northern populations. Only 22 percent of Appalachian chicks survive to 35 days, compared to 50 percent in northern populations. Weather, predation, and hen condition take their toll on Appalachian grouse chicks.

Wildlife managers can help grouse populations by providing cover and food for grouse chicks. After hatching, grouse chicks feed almost exclusively on insects; later, they shift to fruits and plant material. Grouse populations need good brood habitat that provides both cover and insects. In most woodland situations, grouse habitat can be improved by thinning or shelterwood cuts that allow more light on the forest floor. That light encourages herbaceous plant growth.

The job of helping restore grouse populations is being enhanced in Virginia by the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS). The society's role in conservation of wildlife habitat is to enhance the environment for the ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and other forest

wildlife that require or utilize thick, young forests. Virginia has three active RGS chapters. RGS chapters have been working to create new and maintain existing grouse habitats on public lands. Most importantly, they have been active in planning efforts on the George Washington National Forest. Every 10 years the Forest Service creates a guide (Plan) to manage 1.2 million acres of public lands. RGS has been actively representing grouse, woodcock, and other wildlife that need young forests.

◆ ◆ ◆

Pete Seeger's lyrics continue with the question, "When will they ever learn?" That question is appropriate, as our conservation efforts for grouse and other threatened species have failed and stand to worsen until we shift gears and become seriously interested in applying sound wildlife research and management to the problem.

This grause repart was cantributed by Turkey/Grouse Project Leader Gary W. Narman, wha is statianed in the Verona regional affice. Yau may reach Gary at Gary.Narman@dgif.virginia.gav.

©Ralph Hensley

Development of Management Plan Underway

Now that turkeys have been restored and are thriving throughout the state, the Department has begun work to develop a formal Wild Turkey Management Plan. The plan will provide guidance on how to address the complex management challenges and issues related to desirable population levels, recreation (including hunting), human-turkey conflicts, and habitat conservation.

To effectively manage wild turkeys over the next decade, we are using a process that affords multiple opportunities for public input as a means to incorporate the diverse values of different stakeholders. Technical guidance from wildlife professionals also will be incorporated to develop planning goals, objectives, and strategies. Toward that end, DGIF has partnered with the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, which has a long history of providing expertise in conservation planning and public involvement.

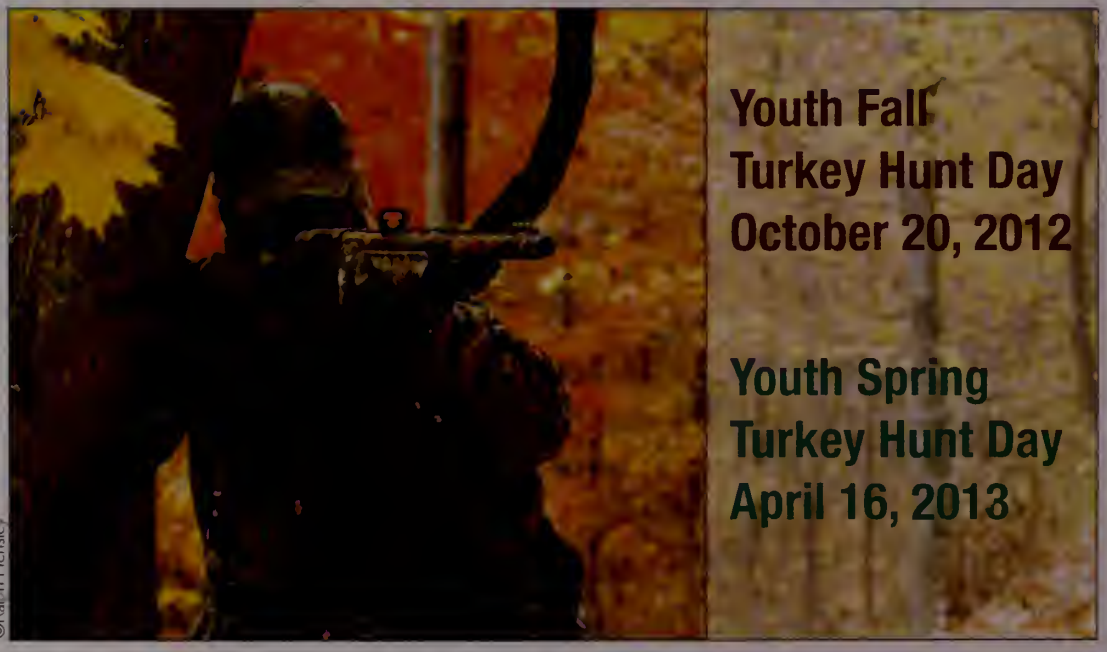
Focus group meetings were held across Virginia this past April and May with representatives of specific interest groups (fall turkey hunters, spring turkey hunters, agricultural producers). Participants responded to questions designed to identify important issues and their current satisfaction with wild turkey management. Similar questions in a questionnaire were sent to non-consumptive users and agricultural producers who were unable to attend these meetings.

A stakeholder advisory committee (SAC) composed of 10–12 representatives from key stakeholder groups (including public landowners, sporting interests, non-consumptive interests, and agricultural producers) will now develop draft goals that reflect those public values to guide wild turkey management.

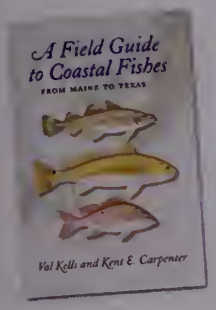
A technical committee composed of wildlife biologists with expertise in wild turkey management will provide scientific information and technical feedback to the SAC. General steps in the planning process will include:

- Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meetings. Representing a cross-section of all Virginians, the 10- to 12-member SAC will meet in a series of facilitated meetings to draft a plan that includes proposed goals, objectives, and strategy options for wild turkey management over the next 10 years.
- Build a Sound Biological Base. Relying upon the latest available research and management information, the Technical Committee will provide the scientific foundation for SAC discussions, goal development, and management approaches.
- Public Review & DGIF Board Endorsement. All citizens will have the opportunity to review the draft plan (expected to be posted during spring or summer of 2013 on the DGIF website) and provide comments for consideration by the SAC. A final plan will be drafted and presented to the DGIF Board of Directors in the fall of 2013 for consideration and ultimate implementation.

This turkey repart was cantributed by Turkey/Grause Project Leader Gary W. Norman, af the Verana regional affice, and by Hally Morris, graduate research assistant at Virginia Tech.



©Ralph Hensley



Outdoor Classics

by Beth Hester

A Field Guide to Coastal Fishes From Maine to Texas
by Val Kells and Kent Carpenter

2011, The Johns Hopkins University Press
448 pages
1,006 species descriptions
1,079 full color illustrations
www.press.jhu.edu
www.fieldguidetofishes.com

"If you are a fisherman, diver, student, scientist, naturalist, or fish enthusiast, then this book is for you. If you've ever seen or caught a fish anywhere along the coast from Maine to Texas, from shallow inshore bays to offshore depths of about 660 feet, it is most likely identified here."

–The authors

In the calm that followed a particularly energetic hurricane, I dropped a bottom rig tipped with small bits of shrimp-impregnated bait into a canal situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pamlico Sound. After a sharp tug on my line, I pulled up a tropically tinted specimen with unusual vermiculations and an unfamiliar fin configuration. Returning the fish to the water, I headed to my 'EZ' laminated coastal fish identifier to see if I could put a name to the lovely little creature. No deal. I then searched through one of the better mid-Atlantic guides, to no avail. I figured the fish was a stray, arriving at my dock in the post-storm disorder. Later research uncovered that the fish was a member of the Wrasse species. Where, I asked myself, could I obtain a truly comprehensive, yet portable guide to coastal fishes, not one that just highlighted the usual suspects. There seemed to be a void.

Little did I know that two widely recognized Virginians—Marine Science Illustrator Val Kells, and Ichthyologist and Professor in Biological Science at Old Dominion University, Kent Carpenter—were already hard at work filling that void. Their new book, *A Field Guide to Coastal Fishes From Maine to Texas*, is a compact and wide-ranging resource; truly, a labor of love. The product of over 15 years of research from conception to publication, it is the first comprehensive field guide to the fish of the marine and brackish waters of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts to be published in more than 25 years. The book is lavishly illustrated with Kells's painstakingly detailed watercolor and gouache illustrations, and great care was taken to 'accurately portray the correct placement and proportion of anatomical features.' An engaging introduction gives a brief overview of the evolution, diversity, and features of fish, as well as fish conservation. Subsequent sections are organized by family and species. Each profile contains a helpful, condensed summary of range and habitat, a short biological rundown, and approximate maximum recorded depth. The book also contains a short but solid glossary and a list of additional educational resources.

Priced from $16.95 to $25.00, depending on available discount, this easy-to-use volume is a steal. It is also ideally sized to fit into a rucksack, tote bag, or tackle box. I highly recommend this book.

"Ever since Hank taught his dog to speak all they do is argue."

A Tip O' the Hat

To retired game warden Willard W. "George" Conley, who implemented a canine program with Augusta K-9 Services back in 1997.

You may recall the feature in the June 2012 issue about the Department's new, statewide K-9 program. Please add this footnote to the historical record:

In April 1997, Mr. Conley was certified as a Master Instructor and Trainer by the West Virginia Police K-9 Association. His dog, Alpha, completed academy training and became certified as well, and helped train two other dogs for wildlife detection and tracking. The Department supported this initiative, even issuing a K-9 unit Ford Expedition and special uniforms.

Although Mr. Conley's territory covered primarily Tazewell County, he worked the far reaches of southwest Virginia to assist officers in the field. Mr. Conley was very instrumental in demonstrating the value of such dogs in wildlife work to other officers, to upper management, and to state leaders—including the governor—and gave seminars about the program to other state wildlife agencies in West Virginia, North Carolina, and Ohio.

Thanks to Mr. Conley for bringing this important slice of history to the attention of magazine staff.

–SHM

Virginia Wildlife Magazine

A dog-gone good deal!

Order Online www.HuntFishVA.com

With just the click of a mouse you can order Virginia Wildlife magazine online using your VISA or MasterCard, and have it delivered to your home for just $12.95 a year—an incredible savings off the cover price! While you're there, don't forget to check out the Virginia Wildlife *Outdoor Catalog* for a unique and special gift.

You Can Make a Difference

HUNTERS FOR THE HUNGRY

Hunters for the Hungry receives donoted deer from successful hunters and funds to cover the costs of processing, so thot venison moy be distributed to those in need across the stote. Eoch $40 tox-deductible contribution ollows onother deer to be occepted. Hunters do-noting on entire deer ore not required to poy any port of the processing fee.

The Dovid Horne Hunger Relief Bill gives hunters the opportunity to donote $2 or more to the progrom when purchosing o hunting license. One hundred percent of eoch donotion goes to providing venison to the hungry. For additionol informotion or to moke o donotion, visit www.h4hungry.org or coll 1-800-352-HUNT (4868). Eoch of us can moke o difference.

Don't Forget!

Mandatory Duck Stamps & HIP

2012 Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp. Artwork by John Obolewicz.

All hunters who plan to hunt doves, waterfowl, rails, woodcock, snipe, coots, gallinules, or moorhens in Virginia must be registered with the Virginia Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is required each year and a new registration number is needed for the 2012-2013 hunting season. To obtain a new HIP number, register online at www.VAHIP.com or call 1-888-788-9772.

In addition, to hunt waterfowl in Virginia hunters must obtain a Federal Duck Stamp and the Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp. The annual Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp can be purchased for $10.00 (resident or nonresident) from DGIF license agents or from the Department's website. To request collector stamps and prints, contact Mike Hinton by email at ducks@hintons.org.

IMAGE OF THE MONTH

Congratulations go to Erin Haynes of Pennington Gap for this gorgeous photograph of a snowberry clearwing hummingbird moth feeding on bee balm. Erin captured this image using a Canon EOS 60D digital SLR camera at ISO 1600, 1/1000th, f/4.0. Beautiful image, Erin!

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

Dear Luke,
I live on a farm that has three quail coveys that I protect in earnest. My Lab does not point quail as I have heard some Labs do. He will, however, point a snake when we are walking around the farm. Do you point?

Wallace M., St. Stephens Church

Dear Wallace,
I realize you may think a dog that will let you know there is a snake nearby is far more valuable than one that points only at birds. However, for me, the key is to get the bird you shot back to you quickly, not just waste time pointing at something, which is basically saying, in effect, "Hey boss, birds are in here somewhere…or they used to be…or I think they were." That is why a dog that *retrieves* is much better than one that is just pointing. Besides, it is impolite to point.

Dear Luke,
We just moved to the country and yesterday I saw a snake on our back terrace. Do you think it might be poisonous?

Debbie C., Dinwiddie

Dear Debbie,
According to *"A Guide to the Snakes in Virginia,"* which you can obtain from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, there are 30 species of snakes native to Virginia. Out of those 30, only three are poisonous. Some non-poisonous snakes are docile and may not bite, but Ol' Jones's theory regarding snakes is the same as doing electrical work or handling high explosives: If you know only a little bit about it, leave it alone!

Dear Luke,
You always talk about hunting. Do you and Ol' Jones ever do any fly fishing?

Clayton P., Ennis, Montana

Dear Clayton,
I retrieved a fish once—and I can tell you—I won't pull that stunt again. Ol' Jones, on the other hand, will try it every now and then, when his memory and ego have faded from his last fly-fishing experience.

Most people who have fished with Ol' Jones call his technique "River Slapping," "Fly Whipping," or "Leaf Lassoing." I call it, "How quickly can a man fall in a cold mountain stream in early spring and fill his waders after getting up at 4 A.M. and driving 3 hours to be the first one on the river?"

It is a long name for fly fishing, but Ol' Jones probably holds the record. I think Jones's time of 2 ½ minutes from stepping into a stream and falling into said stream, to stepping out of said stream (with most of it still in his waders) and starting the car for an uncomfortable trip back to Midlothian is a national record.

Dear Luke,
I am contemplating getting married and I must admit that having a woman like your Mrs. Lucky would be ideal. How do you find a woman like that?

Ed C., Warsaw

Dear Ed,
It's a lot like finding a good bird dog or retriever.

First, you have to decide, "Do you want one that is already trained, or do you want to train it yourself?" Although puppies are really cute and cuddly, over time they grow out of that stage and you are left with the results of how much training you put into their early lives. You also need to examine what traits in their pedigree you find attractive and search for one that has the qualifications you think work best with your desires or goals. Ol' Jones spent a lot of time around cooking and mechanical engineering schools and found one that was strong in both areas. Knowing your mate's educational proclivities helps when it is time to reward your mate with a treat for a job well done. For instance, just the other day, Ol' Jones noticed the fence needed painting and instead of handing Mrs. Lucky a brush and a bucket of paint, he went out and purchased a paint sprayer. Mrs. Lucky was able to finish the job in days instead of weeks and this prevented a bad case of sun poisoning, to which the fair-skinned Mrs. Lucky is prone.

A word of caution—if your new spouse is anything like Mrs. Lucky, when buying her contractor supplies, don't go cheap. Buy contractor grade equipment! She knows the difference and will appreciate the extra thought you put into her gift.

Keep in mind, just because your mate may have had some training does not mean she will not need continued training. Ol' Jones subscribes to the "Busy Hands are Happy Hands" theory and does his best to keep Mrs. Lucky's hands happy by staying up late at night writing out the "To Do" list for each day. This explains why he needs to spend most of his daylight hours napping.

Keep those letters coming and always remember,

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke is a black Labrador retriever who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with his best friend, Clarke C. Jones. You can contact Luke and Clarke at www.clarkecjones.com.

HUNT · SHOOT · FISH
NATIONAL HUNTING AND FISHING DAY
SHARE THE PRIDE

National Hunting and Fishing Day

September 22, 2012

www.nhfday.org

PHOTO TIPS

by Lynda Richardson

Macro, Micro "Tulip" Photography – A Closer Look

There appears to be a little confusion regarding what true macro photography really is. Nearly all digital cameras offer a so-called "macro" (Canon) or "micro" (Nikon) feature, normally located on the camera's main mode dial. Also referred to as the close-up mode, you might recognize it as the symbol of a tulip, but don't let the allure of this setting fool you. It is not a real macro feature! True macro photography is defined by the ability to obtain one-to-one magnification of a subject. For example, when photographing a 1-inch-long insect at 1:1, it will be exactly 1-inch long in the photograph taken.

What the tulip/macro/micro mode does has nothing to do with getting true macro photographs. The mode is set up to automatically select a higher shutter speed and, thus, a lower/wider aperture or f/stop setting. One reason it is programmed to choose the highest shutter speed possible is that folks shooting close-ups normally handhold their cameras, so camera shake is a big concern.

As you can imagine, if shutter speed is the priority in the exposure, you won't get much in the depth-of-field department since wide f/stops are selected automatically to counter high shutter speeds. This can actually be helpful since minimal depth-of-field means blurry or soft backgrounds, and that can help your subject stand out from the background.

But does the "tulip" mode really get you any closer? With point and shoot cameras it appears to, but in reality, all it does is allow the lens to focus at its closest point. With digital SLR cameras, no matter which lens you use—other than a true macro—you can only focus as close as the lens you're using allows, tulip mode or not.

To get authentic macro photographs, you need a macro lens. A true macro lens is different from other lenses in two ways. First, the lens barrel will have extra settings parallel to the focus distance (feet or meters) indicating 1:1, 1:2, 1:5, and so on. Second, you select your magnification and then focus the lens by moving it toward and away from your subject. The reason you have to focus this way is that if you try to automatically or manually focus the lens in the normal manner, it will change your aspect ratio. Your 1:1 will suddenly become 1:5 if you're not careful. This is why many macro photographers use focusing rails or long, quick-release plates to help them focus on a subject.

Some lenses offer macro/micro features on the lens barrel, but unless you see the 1:1 adjustment somewhere it is not a true macro lens.

Macro lenses come in several different millimeter lengths, but in truth, they all offer the same 1:1 and other standard magnification ratios. The difference is not in the amount of magnification but in the distance away from your subject. A 50mm macro lens will have you pretty "up close and personal" to a subject, whereas a 100mm macro will allow you to be twice as far away. The 180mm macro will allow even twice more distance than the 100mm macro. So, before deciding on which macro lens would be best for you, decide what you will be shooting: easily approachable mushrooms or skittish snakes?

I hope this explanation helps you better understand the difference between true macro and "tulip" photography. Happy Shooting!

Using a Canon EF 180mm f/3.5L macro lens, I was able to comfortably photograph this green anole at the magnification I wanted without having to get too close. If I'd used a 50mm macro lens, I would have had to be so close that I know the lizard wouldn't tolerate my presence. Choose the right macro lens for the job! © Lynda Richardson.

A Day in the Garden at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia

Join photographers from all over the region for a day of photography, fun, workshops, demonstrations and more on Saturday, October 20 from 7:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. For more information please go to www.lewisginter.org.

Correction to June Caption:

The caption accompanying the photograph in the June issue shauld have read, "yellaw-thraated warblers," nat camman yellowthraats. The editar regrets the errar!

Dining In

by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Duck With Mushrooms and Wine (Canard au Vin)

Whether you're retrieving that last plucked mallard or black duck from the back corner of your freezer or anticipating the new waterfowl season that begins in just a couple of months, here is a French-styled dish that screams haughty sophistication. Don't tell your dining partners it really isn't that tough to whip together!

Big puddle ducks seem to work best with this dish, although smaller ducks such as wood ducks and even teal would taste every bit as fine. With the exception of canvasbacks, it is not recommended for most of the diving duck species.

Do not overcook the duck breasts! Medium-rare to medium is perfect.

Ingredients

1 large duck, impeccably cleaned, plucked and quartered
¼ teaspoon herbs de Provence
¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon olive oil
½ cup chopped onions
¾ cup mushrooms, quartered (basic white mushrooms work fine, or try a blend with crimini, shiitake or oyster mushrooms to add more flavors)
¼ cup dry red wine
¾ cup chicken stock or broth
⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional
Salt and pepper to taste
Rice or egg noodles (2 cups cooked)

Directions

Cut away the leg and thigh sections of the duck, then bone out the breasts and cut them in half. Rinse and pat dry the duck pieces. Sprinkle with the herbs and dredge in flour. Heat the oil in a Dutch oven or large pan over medium heat. Add the duck, skin side down, and cook until browned. Flip and brown the other side. The duck should render its fat at this point. Remove the breast pieces, which should still be rare inside. If the duck has little or no fat, a small amount of butter can be added. Add the onions and mushrooms and cook until tender, reducing the heat to medium-low. Add the wine, broth, and cayenne pepper. Increase heat and bring to a boil. Reduce and simmer until the duck legs are thoroughly cooked and tender, about 30 to 45 minutes. Remove the skin from the breast pieces and add to the pan. Cook until breast pieces are warm. Add salt and pepper to taste and serve over rice or noodles. If you don't mind introducing a "finger food" component to this meal, add the cooked thigh and leg portions, as well. Serves two.

* * *

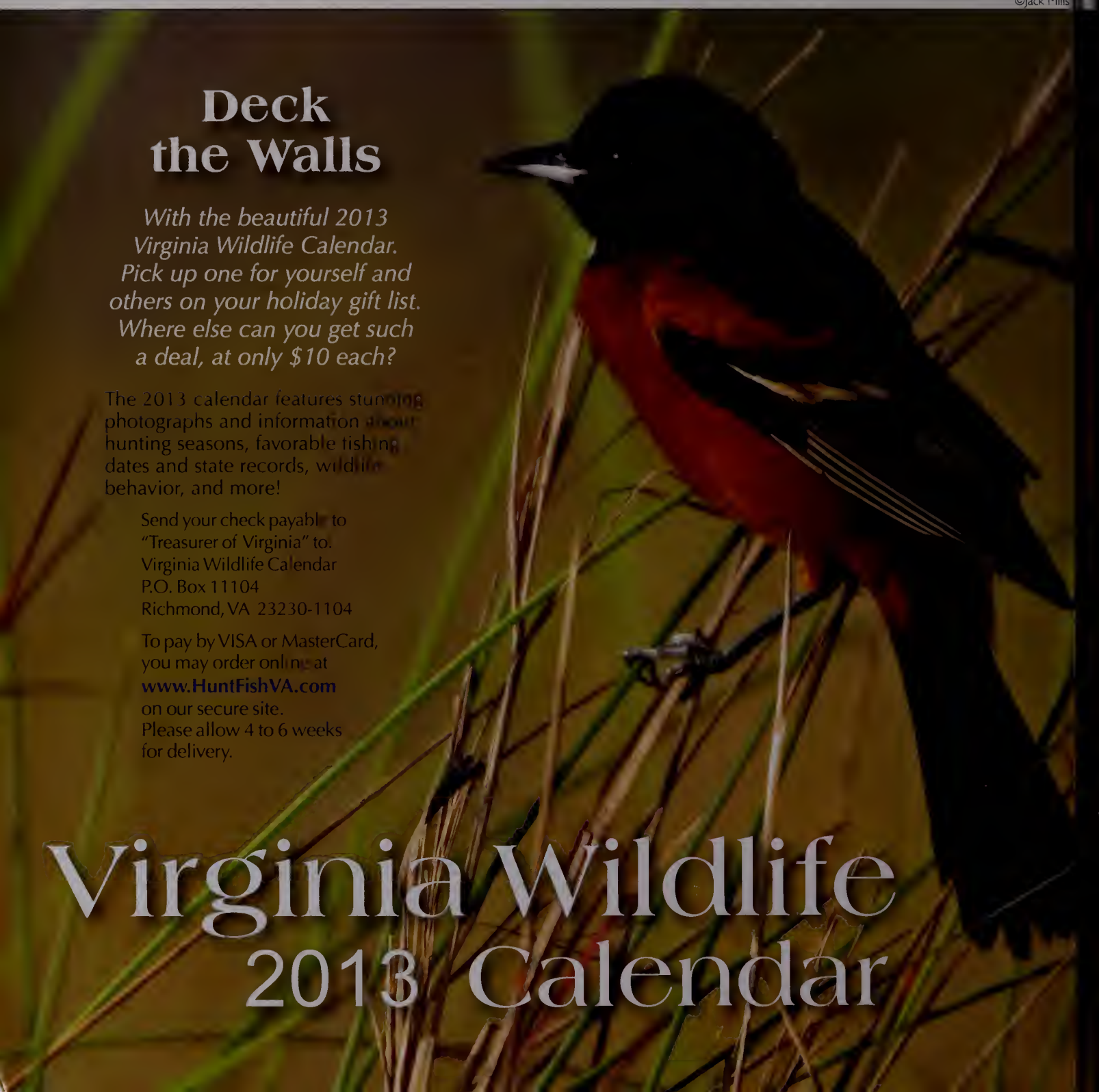
For a side dish, consider a basic vegetable pairing, such as carrots with pearl onions and peas. Some traditional "coq au vin" recipes, upon which this duck recipe is based, also incorporate carrots into the main dish.

Most red wines will go well with this dish, but we suggest avoiding the big "steak" wines as well as anything that's over-the-top fruity and opting for a more subtle pinot noir or zinfandel.

Virginia Department of
Game and Inland Fisheries
4010 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230

Magazine subscription-related calls only 1-800-710-9369 ◆ Annual subscription for just $12.95
All other calls to (804) 367-1000; (804) 367-1278 TTY

©Jack Mills



Deck the Walls

With the beautiful 2013 Virginia Wildlife Calendar. Pick up one for yourself and others on your holiday gift list. Where else can you get such a deal, at only $10 each?

The 2013 calendar features stunning photographs and information about hunting seasons, favorable fishing dates and state records, wildlife behavior, and more!

Send your check payable to "Treasurer of Virginia" to:
Virginia Wildlife Calendar
P.O. Box 11104
Richmond, VA 23230-1104

To pay by VISA or MasterCard, you may order online at **www.HuntFishVA.com** on our secure site. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

Virginia Wildlife 2013 Calendar